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WRITTEN IN FIRE BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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WRITTEN IN FIRE.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE'S CONFLICT," "FIGHTING THE AIR," "HER FATHER'S NAME,"
ETC. ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

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A NOVEL

BY

FLORENCE MARRIAT

AUTHOR OF

"DOES COME", "FIGHTING THE WIND", "THE BETTER LAND"



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OF VOLUME I.

TO

GEORGE AND MARIE NEVILLE,

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF A FRIENDSHIP THAT HAS BORNE THE TESTS OF TIME,

AND CHANGE, AND SEPARATION.

TO

GEORGE AND MARIE NEVILLE

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF A FAVORITISM THAT HAS BORN THE BEST OF THEM

AND GRACE AND BEAUTY

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WRITTEN IN FIRE.

CHAPTER I.

“What is to become of Fabian?”

Two men, engaged in conversation, were pacing slowly up and down the broad walk that intersects the belt of trees complimentarily termed the park of Brusca, and divides it in the form of a cross.

One was an ecclesiastic of the Catholic Church. That was easy to be seen, no less by his closely-shorn face and the dress he wore, than from the deference he exacted from the crowd. The women, clustered in groups beneath the wide-spreading trees, stayed their chatter or their flirtations to make a deep reverence as he passed.

No wonder, for he knew the peccadilloes of every pretty sinner there. His name was Père Raoul, and he was the favourite confessor of the feminine portion of the inhabitants of Brusca.

His companion was an Englishman, although it would have been difficult to have recognised the fact either from his accent or his style of dress.

His long fair beard, slightly intermingled with gray, swept over a coat of black velvet, and the wide-brimmed *sombrero* which he wore covered a head of hair too long to suit the customs of our country. His age may have been fifty, his face, except for a pinched expression, was handsome, and as he appeared, the loiterers had whispered to the few who were unacquainted with him that he was Charles Delacourt, the artist.

He was talking so earnestly with Père Raoul, that after they had exchanged their first salutations he took no further notice of the crowd around him. Every now and then he had to part company with his friend, as an itinerant ice-vendor ran his little vehicle between them, or a flower-girl thrust beneath his nose her basket of roses and geraniums blooming on their bed of damp moss; but as soon as the obstacle was removed the two came together again, and continued their conversation.

If the bystanders had chosen to listen, they might have heard what the priest and the Englishman had to say to each other; but it would not have interested them, especially the women, who care for nothing except it concerns their own faces or the characters of their dearest friends. And this conversation was only about a boy—one of the most uninteresting sections of the human race.

"And so poor Grossetête is gone?" said Charles Delacourt, thoughtfully.

"It is too true," replied the priest. "I was present at his death-bed. He died at four this morning."

"Who would have thought it? I saw him this day last week, apparently in the highest health and spirits. It is almost too sudden for belief."

"His disease was of that insidious type that steals on a man without his knowing it. Death came as unexpectedly to him as to his friends. He had but a few hours' warning of his end. And the saddest part of it is that he has left his widow and children totally unprovided for."

"Is there a large family?"

"Five; and not one of an age to work. Madame Grossetête will be reduced to live on charity."

"This is terrible; and when the man had so much time and talent which he suffered to lie fallow. We must get up a subscription for the widow amongst the artists of Brusca, father. She must not be permitted to suffer for her husband's negligence."

"I am sure that my dear children of Brusca will do all they can to help her. There is not a more charitable people in the country. But whilst we assist others, M. Delacourt, we must not forget ourselves."

"I do not follow you."

"Forgive me for putting the question—which arises from the purest interest in your child and yourself—but should you be cut off without previous warning, as our friend Grossetête has been, *what is to become of Fabian?*"

These words fell upon the ears of Charles Delacourt like a death-knell.

The gay assemblage on either side of him, with its fluttering ribbons and many-coloured parasols, seemed to become blurred and indistinct, the cries of the fruit and ice-sellers, with the strains of the military band playing in the centre of the little park, died away in the distance, and for a moment he stood alone in a blank silence, with only that question knocking at his heart.

The feeling passed as it came. Almost before he had time to recognise it, Charles Delacourt was himself again, his eyesight cleared, his ears became unstopped, and he was smiling in a sickly manner in Père Raoul's face.

"There is no dread?" he said, half interrogatively.

"I sincerely trust not, but it is always well to be prepared. And I have long wished to speak to you of Fabian, M. Delacourt. What is to become of the lad if he goes on much longer in this manner?"

"In what manner does he go on? He enjoys his life, I believe."

"Just so. He does nothing but enjoy it."

"What would you have at his age? He is but eleven years old."

"He is old enough to have his whole life coloured by the education you give him now. And that is—nothing!"

"I consider he is educating himself. The best education you can give a man of the world is a knowledge of the world."

"Fabian is matriculating early, then. But what use will this knowledge prove if you do not also give him strength of mind and purpose with which to combat the world's temptations?"

"I was not aware that the boy was leading such a very frivolous life," said Charles Delacourt, testily. "He goes to school in the mornings."

"When he feels in the humour, that is to say. I know he does; but he also spends his afternoons and evenings at theatres, concerts, shooting-galleries, wherever and with whomever he pleases. And he is a child, quick to take impressions and retain them. *En passant*, do you wish to see him become a member of our church?"

"Certainly not," replied the artist, quickly; and then, as though afraid he might have wounded his

friend's feelings, he added: "All my family have been Protestant from time immemorial, father, and you know how strong amongst us is the feeling against a change of faith."

"Very good. I have no desire to make a proselyte of Fabian. But are you aware that he scarcely ever misses attending early mass at my church?"

"Certainly I am. The boy has inherited my artistic tastes, and nothing delights him more than the beauty of your services."

"I am charmed to hear it; but it is not the way to carry out your own wishes regarding him. I have seen that boy kneeling, with clasped hands and the tears running down his face, at the more pathetic or impressive portions of the service."

"I must stop that," said Delacourt, with something of British bluntness, "though I don't see what real harm it can do the child to indulge his imaginative faculties. He will have to live by them."

"You design him, then, for an artist like yourself?"

"I design him for anything that his nature makes him, but that must be artistic. His mother was an artist, so am I. Fabian cannot but have inherited our tastes. Sometimes I think he will be a musician—his proficiency on the violin is wonderful for his age. At other times all his fancy appears to be for

colour and shape. There is no knowing—he may even turn out to be a sculptor. Anything, so he evinces taste and feeling."

"You would be disappointed if he took to business, then?"

"I should no longer recognise him as part of myself. I could not sympathise with him. He would still be my child, but only my child, not a friend and companion."

"That is all very well, so long as you remain to be his help and counsellor. But some day—however distant—this creature, whose imagination alone you care to train, whose feelings have been systematically indulged, whilst his moral strength has been left to take care of itself, must in the course of nature become his own master. And if his feelings and imaginations lead him to dislike work, how will it fare with him?"

"I shall not leave Fabian completely penniless, father. I have five thousand pounds invested in his name. Should his inclinations lead him to be idle, he can afford, moderately, to be so."

Père Raoul sighed. The thoughts of this man of the world went no farther than to provide for the wants of his child's body. He was letting him grow up like a beautiful flower running to seed for need of training and coercion. Yet he was satisfied, even

in the contemplation of his death, to remember that Fabian would have enough to eat and drink.

"Have you made a will, M. Delacourt?" said the priest, after a pause.

"I have not."

"And in the event of your death, who will assume the guardianship of your son?"

"I have never thought of it. It seems so unlikely at my age that he should ever require one. I look older than I am, father. I am not yet eight-and-forty."

"Grossetête was ten years your junior," remarked Père Raoul, dryly.

"But the poor man was diseased, whilst I, with the exception of an occasional pain in the chest, am hale and hearty. Come, father, your gloomy forebodings shall not make me out of love with life yet. Still, I think you are right, and some guardian shall be appointed to look after Fabian's interest in case of an accident. The difficulty is, whom to nominate."

"Have you no relations in England?"

"No one nearer than a sister, and I have been cut off from communication with her for years. She married at home. I went out and settled in Italy, and our paths have been separate ever since. Poor girl! I often think of her and wonder if she is

happy. We loved each other very much in the olden time."

"Do you never contemplate visiting her?"

"Never. Her husband and I were not good friends in our youth, and I scarcely think would agree better in our age. We had no tastes in common. He was a farmer who cared for nothing but the crops and the weather, and laughed at everything that was above his own comprehension. I never could understand what made my sister marry him; she, who had always been so sympathetic with all I said or thought."

"Ah, my friend, you will live, perhaps, to find out that those who are most ready to help are not always those who have most sympathy with us," commenced the priest in answer, but he had only proceeded so far when their conversation was interrupted by the very subject of it, who, having doffed his cap at the presence of Père Raoul, ran up straight to his father with an eager beaming face, and exclaimed in perfect French: "Father, Mademoiselle Persil has given me four stalls for the opera, where I am going with a party of my friends this evening, as my *abonnement* for the theatre expired yesterday. And Madame Armand has sent me an invitation to her juvenile ball for the first of next month, and there is to be a military concert at the Jardins to-

morrow. You will go with me, won't you, father; and may I have some money to renew my *abonnement*? It is only fifteen francs."

"We will settle all this, Fabian, by-and-by. Where have you spent this afternoon, that we have not seen you in the park sooner?"

"I have been in the Quinçonce, father, where they have a harlequin concert. And part of the time in M. Fevrier's studio. You must go and see his design for the Prometheus. It is grand. I could not tear myself away from it. But do not let me interrupt your conversation with Père Raoul," the boy added, with all the native politeness for which his adopted country is celebrated.

He was a beautiful boy, tall for his age, and graceful as a young deer. His hair, of deep chestnut colour flecked here and there with gold, lay in curls upon his broad Vandyke collar; his eyes were of a dreamy blue, with long dark lashes and well-marked brows, which contrasted with his fair and delicate complexion. His whole appearance was that of one possessing a highly bred and organised nature, with more sensitiveness than humour in his disposition, and in his heart more tenderness than strength.

As he slipped his hand in his father's, prepara-

tory to accompanying him in his walk, there were greetings for him from every side.

The dark-eyed *bonnes* with their snow-white caps nodded to him from behind their perambulators full of babies; little children quaintly attired as *zouaves* or *matelots* shouted his name, and ran, and clung to his legs; even the ladies condescended to look up from their books or work and smile a welcome to him as he passed. Fabian appeared to be a universal favourite; but he was not to be seduced from his father's side by any of their blandishments.

"Père Raoul and I were talking of you, my child," said Delacourt, in answer to the boy's last request.

"Of me, father! Have I done anything wrong?" with a quick look of solicitude.

"No, no, Fabian, certainly not; but we have been wondering what you will wish to do as you grow older. Whether you will paint pictures, as I and M. Fevrier do, or whether you will play the violin, like M. Samuel!"

"To paint pictures," said the child, musingly. "Ah, that would be delightful; to be able to conceive so grand a figure as Prometheus; to dream of it, and then to put it upon canvas, it would be a great glory. But to have to sell them afterwards, father! That is what would so much hurt me. To

live for months on one thought, and then when it was finished to sell it for money. It would be like selling one's own child. No; I don't think I could bear to be an artist; it would wound me too much."

"You will be a musician, then?"

"Music, that is charming; you can make it, and read it, and translate it; and you have more pleasure in it even than those that hear you. Yet, after all, what good is it, father?"

"I do not understand you, Fabian."

"What good does it do to others? It is beautiful to listen to. The music in the churches makes one feel so holy and so anxious to please God; but I would rather be the one to do the good than to give the feeling of it."

"You are talking nonsense, child," said Charles Delacourt, somewhat impatiently. "You do not know what you mean yourself."

Fabian looked distressed, and glanced across his father at the priest.

"I think Père Raoul will understand me," he replied timidly. "I mean that I like painting and music, and everything that is beautiful, oh, very, very much; but, for myself, I would rather be a doctor and heal the sick, like the saint whose pic-

ture is in all the churches, than a violinist or an artist."

Charles Delacourt let go of his child's hand and walked by himself. Fabian's speech had wounded him. He had made so sure of his son's artistic proclivities. And now to wish to be a doctor, the most prosaic and matter-of-fact of all professionals. Pshaw! the boy was a traitor to his blood.

"You are not angry, father?" pleaded the childish voice at his side, whilst the soft hand caught hold of his with a gesture of entreaty. "I will be anything you wish me to be. The other is only a fancy on my part, which, perhaps, the good saint's life has taught me. You are not angry with me?"

Delacourt could not resist the appeal. He threw his arms about his boy's neck and kissed him fondly; but it was Père Raoul's voice that answered his question.

"No, Fabian, you need have no fear. Your father always desires you should treat him with perfect confidence. And now I wish you both good evening, for my duty takes me towards home."

But before he parted with M. Delacourt, Père Raoul whispered:

"Have a care, my friend. The Almighty has placed a beautiful soul in your charge. Do not

strive to sully its purity with any thoughts more worldly than its own."

After the priest had left them, the father and son walked together for some little time in silence. The band was still playing, but less happily than before, for opposition strains of music had arisen from the Quinçonce and the Vauxhall, which were situated at each end of the little park; and the effect of the interruption was not harmonious. The ladies, who had been sitting on their hired chairs for hours, apparently as much at home as in their own drawing-rooms, commenced to gather up their work and books, with an evident design towards moving. They had already settled where they should meet each other that evening, and would only give themselves time to change their dresses and snatch a hasty meal, before they would sally forth again in pursuit of the pleasure that costs so much less in Brusca than it does in England.

Delacourt turned his steps towards the park gates, with Fabian still clinging to his hand.

"May I have the money to renew my *abonnement* for the theatre, father?" demanded the boy, more with a view to recommencing conversation, than from any fear of a refusal.

"Yes, if you wish it. But did I not give you a

louis-d'or the day before yesterday. Where has all that gone to?"

The child coloured.

"I have spent it, father."

"On what?"

"Must I tell you?"

"I have no wish to force your confidence, but I should like to know. However, do as you please."

"I would rather not tell you, then."

"I am at a loss to account for your hesitation."

"It is not for myself. It is because — because——"

"Because what?"

"Père Raoul said—— Oh, father! I gave it away to a poor man who had just come out of hospital—so weak, and white, and thin—and I thought it would buy food and wine to make him strong again."

"You did right. It was a kind thought; but why did you wish to keep it from me, Fabian?"

"Because Père Raoul said in his sermon last Sunday, that if we wished to do good for the sake of itself we should not blazon it to the world."

Delacourt was silent.

"This child is getting beyond me," he thought. "What the father says is true. He has too tender

and sensitive a nature to fight the world alone. He would be robbed and taken in at every turn."

Then to the boy, aloud:

"You are very fond of Père Raoul, Fabian?"

"Oh, certainly, father. But who is not fond of him? He is beloved of all Brusca."

"Yet I think it would be better if you did not attend his church so constantly."

"Not go to S. Joseph's! Am I, then, to pray at home?"

"There is your own chapel ready for you. We are not Catholics, you know; we are Protestants."

"What are Protestants, father?"

"They are members of a different faith. They have their own services, which are conducted in the church in the Rue St. Lazare."

"What! in that white-washed room? That isn't a church, father. It is more like a hospital ward."

"Nevertheless, it is the only church we Protestants possess in Brusca, and I think I must send you there for the future."

The boy looked aghast.

"But, father, it is such a dismal place. They have no music, and they speak English. How could I understand them?"

"You know a little English, and you will soon pick it up. Indeed, it is advisable for that reason

alone that you should attend the English services. At any rate you are not to go to mass at S. Joseph's again. I can't have you turning Catholic."

"My mother was a Catholic," said Fabian, sadly; but it was only the music he lamented, not the religion, of which he knew little.

His father would not answer the charge. He was beginning dimly to understand that reformation was needed in some quarter or another, and he thought he was doing right in commencing by laying his prohibition on the teachings of Père Raoul.

For had not Fabian's nonsensical idea of embracing the profession of medicine originated with his study of the life of the doctor saint in the church of S. Joseph? The boy would talk about entering a monastery next. It was ridiculous—absurd. It must be checked at any cost.

CHAPTER II.

"Was it a Warning?"

THE apartments occupied by Charles Delacourt and his son, and which had been their home in Brusca for several years past, were situated in the artists' quarter of the town, and surrounded by studios and picture-dealers' stores.

They consisted of three rooms only, all on the same floor. The front one, a large lofty apartment, which Delacourt reserved for his work, might have formed the entrance to a hall of justice or an audience chamber in the days when Brusca was in the hands of the Spaniards, so pretentious were its adornments in comparison with its present use. Its carved oak panelling and ceiling gave it a look of importance, with which the old-fashioned chairs, with their faded velvet cushions, and the inlaid cabinets decorated with bits of brass and china, were not out of keeping. Canvases of all sizes, and covered with designs in every stage of progression, littered the walls, the floors, and the easels, for Charles Delacourt, with the soul of a true artist, had the misfortune to possess an income which lifted

him above necessity. Consequently his talent had never received the stimulus of want, and his indolent dreamy nature had been far too much indulged for his own good, or that of his little son.

He preferred to let life slip away in musing over the fancies engendered by his genius, to exerting himself to make his hand produce what his brain had conceived. So he would sit, day after day, a handsome indolent picture in his artist's blouse, with a sketched-out wood nymph or water naiad before him, dreaming, amidst the blue clouds that issued from his meerschäum, of what the figure would look like when he had painted in the flesh tints and surrounding foliage. And the graceful nymph continued to reproach him with her half-finished loveliness for many a long day together, whilst he smoked and dreamt the time away.

He had been moderately successful in his profession always, and once or twice he had been triumphantly successful, as when his great picture of Perseus and Andromeda afforded the connoisseurs food for conversation for an entire season, or when his designs for the bas-reliefs in the new Hall of Justice in Brusca carried off the gold medal which Fabian wore so proudly round his neck.

But Charles Delacourt had never cared to follow up his successes by active labour; so they remained,

what they had appeared to be, the work of chance. He knew that if he were actually in need, he could coin money, and until the necessity came he was quite contented to let matters remain *in statu quo*, and to use his art more as an amusement than a profession.

So it is no wonder that Fabian had become imbued with the same ideas, and imagined his life was to be one long happy dream, freighted with no heavier anxiety than to please the parent who was father and mother to him in one. The silver and brass bowls of roses which were scattered about the tables and floor of Delacourt's studio were arranged and placed there by his child's hand, and it was Fabian's pride that no painter's room in Brusca, not even M. Fevrier's, could rival his father's for elegance and artistic taste.

A piano stood in one corner, with the violin and violoncello in their cases by its side, whilst a pile of well-used music proved the instruments were not there for display only.

The bed-chamber, which opened from the studio, was occupied by both father and son. Never, from the day his young mother had left him, a helpless baby of three years old, on her husband's hands, had Fabian been separated from his father. The

child had slept with him, fed with him, shared his every pleasure and pursuit. And herein lay the danger at which Père Raoul had been bold enough to hint. Those artists' orgies for which Delacourt's rooms were so famous were harmless amusement enough for the lawless set who assembled at them, but hardly fit scenes for a young boy to assist at. Yet Fabian was never to be driven from his father's side by his own fatigue or the lateness of the hour. There would be music intermingled with the wilder pleasures of these meetings, for the rough students of Brusca were very sensible to the influences of melody, and Fabian would modestly bear his part in the amusement of his father's guests; and when the conversation turned upon topics he could not understand or did not feel an interest in, he would lay his head upon Delacourt's knee and quietly fall to sleep.

Nay, there was a report in Brusca that on one occasion, when the morning sun shone in upon a party of drunken sleepers in that studio, the young boy was found amongst the rest, sleeping his innocent natural sleep with his face pillowed on his father's breast, as unconscious as the worst amongst them. But, if that were the case, Fabian had never known of it; for Delacourt had fortunately waked before him, and with remorseful shame carried the

child to his bed, and double-locked the door until the house was clear again.

Still, all he heard and saw—the men he associated with, and the scenes he witnessed—had ripened Fabian's intelligent mind to an unnatural degree; and at eleven years old he thought and talked, as far as was possible for his age, like a little man.

This fact had never impressed itself upon Delacourt's mind so powerfully as on the evening that Père Raoul spoke to him on the subject. As he returned home from the park with his boy, he weighed each word he uttered, and found them more and more beyond his years.

This discovery made him feel grave—he scarcely knew why. He entered his apartments with an air of preoccupation, and hung up his *sombrero* with a sigh.

Fabian did not observe his father's mood. In the third chamber which belonged to them was laid the meal—half dinner, half supper—which they usually indulged in in the summer season. This child, brought up entirely without female influence, was more like a daughter than a son in his attention to his father's wants. He went to market for him, and ordered his meals, and scolded the woman of the house if anything went wrong. It was this,

as well as the other, that was so fast transforming him from a boy to a man. On the present occasion he flew to mix the salad, arrange the fruit, and draw the cork of Delacourt's burgundy, so that he had no opportunity for observing his father's depression.

"It is past seven, and the opera commences at eight," remarked Delacourt, as their meal drew to a close. "You had better make haste, or you will be late."

"I am not sure if I shall go," said Fabian, with an air of indifference. "It is 'Lucrezia Borgia,' and if I have heard it once, I have done so twenty times."

"Who is going with you?"

"Philippe Armand and Jean Richet."

"They may not have heard the opera twenty times yet. It is due to them that you should keep your engagement."

"You are right, father," replied the boy, as he rose from the table. "I would rather have remained with you this evening, but I promised to meet them at the opera-house at a quarter before eight, and I must not break my word. *Hélas!* how often one has to do things against one's inclination in this world."

And, with this old-fashioned remark, Fabian

fetches his cap and ran away, blithe and joyous as befitted his age, but leaving his father wrapped in deep meditation.

The bright little chamber in which Delacourt sat—a contrast to the gloomy half-lighted studio beyond it—looked out upon a garden of roses and lilies, blooming beneath trees from which birds were chanting evening hymns to the declining day. Everything around him was calculated to promote cheerfulness. On the table were all the luxuries he cared to have; he had no ailment of which to complain; in his pocket he knew was a fairly-lined purse, and he owed no man anything. Whence then arose the unaccountable feeling of melancholy that had taken possession of him?

He felt it was there, but he could not define its cause; and he commenced to think back, as people do under such circumstances, in order to trace its origin, until, with a start, he arrived at the news of the death of M. Grossetête, and the conversation that ensued with Père Raoul.

His own death! That was the idea that had been depressing him, although, when tracked to its source, it appeared almost too absurd to do more than provoke his laughter.

Yet Delacourt, as he remembered it, filled a

tumbler to the brim with burgundy and drained it at a draught.

Remote as the contingency appeared, there was, no doubt, much good sense in the caution of the priest; and he ought to make sure provision, in case of accident, for the ordering of Fabian's future life. The fact was, that Charles Delacourt had so cut himself off from all his family by settling abroad, that his son was hardly aware that he possessed any relations. The father had left England so early—before his hopes or wishes were half-formed—that he could scarcely have been said to live until he went to Italy, and he had never been in the habit of speaking to Fabian of anything that took place before that period.

His own memory of it, even, was rendered faint by time; and the only figure which stood out from the crowd with any distinctness was that of his sister Emily, who had been a girl of twenty—just a year his junior—when he saw her last, and must have been, were she alive, a woman of six-and-forty at the time he thought of her. He wondered whether her lot had proved a happy one, or the reverse; whether she was still married, or widowed; whether she had a large family of children, or only one stray bantling like his own. He thought it was a pity now that he had not kept up more communication

with her for Fabian's sake, but the circumstances which had stopped their intercourse had appeared, at that time, insurmountable. Delacourt had come originally of a family of Dissenters, and his sister had married a man of the same persuasion. They were not religious people, any of them, but they condemned to everlasting perdition all those who did not agree with them, which served the same purpose in their eyes; and in their list of the lost were included not only actors, authors, poets, and painters, but all such as frequented theatres, read novels and poetry, and wasted their money upon pictures. Delacourt having, unfortunately as it appeared to them, been born with artistic proclivities, found no loophole by which he could escape their censure, and tired of entreaties to amend his ways and flee from the wrath to come, took the alternative of fleeing from them, and proceeded to Italy for the purpose of study. Thence for a few years he had kept up a desultory correspondence with his sister, Mrs. Hayes, but having fallen in with and married a pretty little French actress, he felt it would be worse than useless to attempt to reconcile his family to the fact, and had left them consequently in ignorance of it altogether.

His wife, to whom he was most tenderly attached, died when Fabian was three years old, and since

then Delacourt had wandered from one city to another, seeking in vain to build up his broken life again. He was not an unhappy man, but he was very far from being a happy one. Rest and content had been strangers to him since Cécile died, and his only pleasure had consisted in seeing her child grow up and become companionable. He had never dreamed but once of replacing his wife, and then Fabian and the woman of his choice had taken a dislike to one another. That was sufficient for Charles Delacourt, and he had given up the pursuit at once as impossible. But should this most unlikely contingency to which Père Raoul had alluded take place whilst Fabian was still a child—so he thought, as he finished his retrospection of the past—it certainly was true that he had no friends to whom he could confide the charge of him, except his sister and her husband in England.

The thought grew on him until he felt as though he dared not postpone the execution of it for another hour. Most people know what it is to be suddenly roused to the consciousness of a neglected duty which may not have troubled them for years, until they feel as if one instant's delay in its fulfilment may be their ruin. Delacourt felt like that as he hastily started up from the dinner-table, and groping his way through the fast increasing dusk

into the studio, lighted the candles that stood in two antique silver sconces above his table, drew his desk before him, and commenced to write:

"MY DEAR EMILY,

"It is now so many years since we have had any communication with each other, that my letter will come upon you almost as a resurrection from the dead. Yet, though I have preserved so long a silence, I can assure you I have not forgotten you, nor do I think, when I remember the affection that existed between us in our young days, that you either can have forgotten the brother for whom you always cared more than he deserved. The reasons why I have not written to you before are too numerous to put on paper; the reason why I do write to you now is because I am very much alone in the world—a widower with one child, and I begin to think I have done wrong in keeping Fabian in ignorance of his relations in England. My dear sister, if you knew the desultory, wandering life I have led since my poor wife's death, you would forgive my silence and apparent indifference—a life of which you, snugly settled still, I hope, in your comfortable homestead of Mordham, can have no idea.

"I am not poor, for at the commencement of

my career I amassed some considerable sums of money, and have five thousand pounds invested in my boy's name, as provision for him in case of my death. My wants are few, and I live as well as I care to do, but I make few friends, and have no regular home. Under these circumstances, it is natural for me to think sometimes what will become of Fabian if, by accident, my life should terminate before he is out in the world. Do not imagine from this that I am ill. I never was a robust man, but I have nothing to complain of, and have every chance of living to a good old age. But should Fabian be deprived of my guardianship, I should much like to think that he would have a home in Norfolk with you until he is of an age to live by himself. Under which circumstances I should, of course, direct that the interest of his little fund recouped you during his minority. The boy is now eleven years old, and has never been in England. A strange longing has suddenly come over me to take him there for a few months and introduce him to you. I shall have the opportunity then, too, of seeing your children, of which, I suppose, you have more than one by this time. Knowing so little of your affairs as I do, it is useless for me to tell more of mine until I hear if this letter reaches your hands, but as soon as I receive

an answer I will make some arrangements to further our meeting. I trust that it will find you and all yours in good health and prosperity.—Believe me, your affectionate brother,

“CHARLES DELACOURT.”

The composition of this letter was a greater effort to the artist than its contents warranted; but long unused as he had been to speaking or corresponding in English, his native tongue came back haltingly to his remembrance, and he was compelled to think over each sentence half-a-dozen times before he transcribed it. As he wrote the last words and leaned back in his seat, a sudden pain attacked him. He bowed himself to one side, grasping the arm of the chair for support, his countenance became gray as the ashes in the grate, and his eyes started in his head. So he remained for a few seconds, then, as the agony died away, his features relaxed, a faint colour stole into his face, and the perspiration came out upon his cheeks and forehead. He leaned back again, and for some minutes did not stir hand or foot. The relief seemed almost as hard to bear as the pain had been. Then he sat up suddenly, drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and passed it over his brow.

“That extraordinary pain again,” he thought to

himself. "It is very unaccountable. I wonder if it proceeds from the chest or the liver. At any rate, if I have much more of it I shall speak to a doctor, for it is useless to endure unnecessary suffering while a dose of medicine may relieve me. I think, as I am about it, it would be just as well if I jotted down the draft of a will, so that I may not lay myself open to any more of the good father's reproaches."

As Delacourt pondered thus, he drew a fresh sheet of paper towards him, but his power of transcription was gone. His hands were almost too weak to grasp the pen, and certainly refused to write intelligibly. He thrust the materials from him impatiently.

"This is absurd," he said, "that a sudden twinge, arising from Heaven knows what, should have the power to make me tremble like a child. I think it must be recalling the old times that has so upset me. Poor Emily! how she cried and clung to me the day we parted, and how impatient Hayes was with her exhibition of feeling. I wonder if that man and I would get on better now than we did then. Let me see. He was six years my senior. He must be four-and-fifty, quite what the world calls a middle-aged man. So, perhaps, am I, and yet I don't feel middle-aged. Sometimes I think

that the love of a woman would make me as young as ever again. If I thought that without injury to Fabian, or faithlessness to Cécile's memory, I might indulge in such a prospect, I—well, I am going to visit England. Let me wait and see what happens to me there. The English roses and the English girls! When I begin to think of them, I wonder I can have expatriated myself so long."

But here the artist's reverie was interrupted by the return of Fabian, who entered the vestibule with a rapid, decided step, as though he lost no time in seeking his father's side again.

"You are back early, my child," said Delacourt, languidly.

"Yes, father; the mother of Jean Richet did not wish him to stay for the ballet, so we left as soon as the opera ended. Philippe laughed at Jean for obeying his mother's wishes, and called him a girl and a milksop; but I told him not to mind, as he was doing right. I wish I had a mother, as Jean has, father," concluded Fabian, as he wound his arms caressingly about Delacourt's neck. The words were so much in accordance with the artist's own thoughts that they emboldened him to reply:

"Though the good God took your mother to himself, Fabian, you have an aunt living—my sister—who I believe would have behaved as a

mother to you, had not we been so separated. I have been thinking much of your aunt to-night, my child, and I regret you have not sooner become acquainted. Would you like to know her, Fabian?"

"I think so, father, if she is like you."

"We were considered very much alike when we were boy and girl together; but it is your face that reminds me most of my sister Emily. She had the same coloured hair and the same shaped features as you have."

"And the same eyes?" said the boy, eagerly.

"No, Fabian; those you inherit from your poor mother, and she had the most beautiful pair of eyes that I ever saw in a woman's face."

"You loved my mother very dearly, father?"

"Very, very dearly."

"I would rather have my own mother back again, than try to look upon my aunt as a mother."

"Of course, Fabian; but since that is impossible, we must make the best of what remains to us."

"And you, too, father. You would rather go to my mother, would you not, than see this sister, from whom you have been so long separated?"

Delacourt started. Again, for the third time that day, was the idea at which he shuddered presented to him, as though Fate were determined

to thrust it before his eyes. Was it a warning? He turned so pale that the boy perceived it.

"Father, are you ill? You don't know how white you have become, nor what dark marks there are beneath your eyes! Shall I fetch you water or some wine? Do speak to me, father! It alarms me terribly to see you like this.

"It is nothing, Fabian," said Delacourt, with a feeble attempt at a smile. "There must be thunder in the air, I think, for the night appears most oppressive to me. These warm days in autumn are generally unhealthy. Let us go out to the Café Régence. A cup of coffee and the fresh air will do me good. Come, Fabian, and be my walking-stick, for I have been sitting and dreaming of the past too long to-night, and I feel faint and dizzy."

CHAPTER III.

"I cannot leave Brusca."

PÈRE RAOUL was one of the kindest hearted and most benevolent of the priests of Brusca.

It has been already said that he was the favourite confessor of all the women there. This did not arise simply from the fact of the charity and delicacy with which he handled the difficult task of cataloguing their iniquities, but because they saw that the principles he inculcated in the confessional were carried into his daily life.

He was the terror of all the miscreants of Brusca, but, at the same time, he was the friend and protector of all the innocent, the weak, and the repentant. The little children looked upon him as a father, for with the fortune which he had sacrificed on entering the Church, he had endowed a crèche for foundlings under the care of the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, which was one of the boasts of Brusca.

The good father had more *protégés* than he could count, whom he had rescued from starvation, ill-treatment, or disease, and it was his delight to

spend all his leisure hours among these little unfortunates, nursing, playing with, or teaching them. Many of them he had seen grow up and go out into the world on their own account, for Père Raoul was upwards of sixty. Some he had launched at his private expense, notably by sending them out to Batavia, where there was a vast field for European labour, where also the good priest possessed a powerful ally in the person of his sister, Madame Van Hoost, who was married to a rich Dutch merchant, and settled in Java.

It was quite a little joke in Brusca to profess to believe that the colonisation of the island was due to Père Raoul and Madame Van Hoost, and even the father himself, when the children in the streets were quarrelling with each other, had been heard to declare that if they were not good, he would ship them off to Batavia, which dark and mysterious threat usually had the effect of dispersing them like magic. Père Raoul lived alone in two meagre little rooms close to his beloved Church of S. Joseph, but he never felt alone, for the affection of the poor followed him wherever he went.

It was the morning after he had walked with Delacourt in the park, that as he was returning home from having offered the ten o'clock mass, a woman pulled him impatiently by the sleeve of his

cassock. He turned, and to his surprise recognised Sophie, an old servant who waited exclusively on Delacourt and his son.

Her eyes were red and inflamed with weeping, and when she had arrested his attention, she could not explain her errand for the sobs that choked her utterance.

Père Raoul, alarmed by her agitation, turned at once in the direction of the artist's lodgings, and they were half-way there before Sophie had made him understand that her master was very ill, and the doctor had been sent for, and Monsieur Fabian was alone, and begged the priest to go to him at once. But as to intelligence of the nature of Delacourt's illness, or how it had occurred, Père Raoul felt he must wait till he could ascertain for himself. He gained the apartments unchallenged; no one appeared either to hasten or retard his progress, but he was hardly prepared for the sight which met his eyes as he entered the studio.

Delacourt was seated in one chair, leaning forward for support on a number of pillows piled upon another placed in front of him. His arms were helplessly extended forward, his eyes fixed and staring, whilst the laboured breathing from his inflated nostrils was painfully audible. By his side stood Fabian, employed in wiping off the thick cold

sweat that stood on his father's forehead, and had already made the hair of his head clammy and damp. The boy looked sorrowful and terribly anxious, but he had evidently no idea of danger. In Père Raoul's eyes, however, Delacourt was a dying man. He had seen too much of death to mistake the fast-glazing eye and the pinched expression that was beginning to fasten upon his features. His first inquiry was what doctor had been summoned to his aid.

"Doctor Roget," was Fabian's reply. "He lives the nearest, and father seems in such pain."

"That is well, but we must send for someone else in case M. Roget should be absent or engaged. Cannot Sophie take a note to M. de Langrier?"

"The king's physician?" replied the boy, with a look of alarm.

"Why not, Fabian? Your poor father is evidently in great suffering, and we must spare no pains to get him relieved as soon as possible."

He wrote the letter and despatched it before he inquired when the attack had come on.

Fabian could not tell him. He had risen, and gone out for a walk in the bright morning sunshine; and on his return had been shocked to find his father gasping and speechless in his chair. It

was he that had arranged the pillows for his greater comfort, and then he had sent Sophie and the mistress of the house for the priest and the doctor. His father had not spoken to him since his return, so he had no idea how long he had been ill.

From what cause did Père Raoul think the pain could have arisen? demanded the boy, in conclusion; and did he imagine the attack would be a long or a short one?

Père Raoul did not answer this question. He soothed Fabian's anxiety with some commonplace remark, but he felt as certain the while that the artist was marked for death as that he himself was free from present suffering.

All this time Delacourt had apparently taken no notice of what went on around him. He was evidently in mortal agony, and his ears and eyes were stopped to sounds and sights from the outside world.

The two doctors happened to arrive together.

Little M. Roget was very much overcome at finding he was to be called in consultation with so big a personage as the court physician, but the great De Langrier paid no attention to anybody but the patient. He produced a case of surgical apparatus, and having made various examinations of the artist's chest and back, replaced his instruments

in silence; then, with a sign to follow him to the other doctor and the priest, he passed into the second sitting-room.

"A dead man," he uttered briefly.

"Without a shadow of doubt," said little Roget, who would have echoed any sentiment proceeding from a court physician.

"Is it as bad as that?" exclaimed Père Raoul, in real distress. "I feared as much from his appearance, but we may be so easily mistaken."

"Hasn't an hour to live," said M. de Langrier.

"Certainly not," chimed in M. Roget.

"And from what cause, may I ask you gentlemen?"

"Paralysis of the heart," replied the physician.

"As plain as a pikestaff," replied the apothecary, only he substituted the French comparison that stands for it.

"Poor boy, poor orphaned child!" said the priest, thinking of Fabian. "And is there nothing then to be done for M. Delacourt, monsieur?"

"Positively nothing."

"Nothing at all," said the echo.

"An hour ago," continued De Langrier, "we might have made some attempts to induce the heart to reaction; but now it is too late, and the least attempt to move the patient would probably be fol-

lowed by immediate death. The kindest thing to do is to leave him perfectly alone. He is in terrible suffering, but it cannot last much longer. I regret I have been unable to be of any service, father, but your poor friend is past all human help."

"I quite agree with M. de Langrier," interposed the little Roget.

Père Raoul was too much overcome to answer them. For a few moments his head was bowed down upon his hands as he thought of the poor lad so soon to be left friendless in the world. But then he remembered that Fabian was alone, and might at any moment be subjected to the shock of seeing his father die; and brushing his hand across his eyes, he rose to join him.

"Will you break it to the boy?" he demanded earnestly of De Langrier.

"Certainly, if you will send him to me here," replied the physician, with professional *nonchalance*.

"Be very gentle with him. He has intelligence beyond his years, and is passionately attached to his father."

"I will do my best to soften the shock," rejoined De Langrier.

"Fabian," said Père Raoul, a moment later, as he returned to the side of Delacourt, "M. de Langrier

wishes to speak to you. Go to him in the next room."

"Will my father soon be better?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"He will soon be relieved of his pain," was the evasive answer. "Go, dear Fabian. I will remain here till you return."

Fabian left the room slowly. Père Raoul looked after him as he might have looked had he been disappearing behind the iron doors of the Inquisition chamber. But time was going fast, and the soul of the man before him slipping away by inches. "M. Delacourt, my dear friend," he exclaimed, "you cannot speak or pray, but one thought of the Cross is sufficient! I conjure you, make your peace with God whilst life remains." But no sign or look betrayed that the dying man had heard a word he said to him.

"He does not require of us an impossibility, M. Delacourt!" the priest went on. "He knows our feebleness and our infirmities. Only a look—an aspiration towards Him in the midst of your terrible pain—and your salvation will be secured. He suffered to save you, and in your sufferings you are united to Him. Submit yourself to them as a just punishment for your sins, and they will be mingled with His for your everlasting salvation. Don't let the thought of Fabian trouble your last moments."

But at the magic name of his child the dying man's eyes turned slowly towards him, and he made a faint effort to speak.

"I will take care of Fabian," said Père Raoul, thinking that was what he wished to say.

"The desk—Fabian," gurgled Delacourt, with a final effort. He attempted to rise as he spoke, but with a sudden twist flung himself nearly upon the breast of the priest instead, and fell forward with a deep groan. At the same moment a shrill cry, checked almost as soon as given, issued from the inner apartment.

Père Raoul knew what the sound portended. The child had received the announcement of his bereavement at the very instant it had taken place, for Charles Delacourt's heart had stopped beating for ever.

* * * *

It was long before Père Raoul lost memory of the scene that ensued—the boy's frantic grief when he found that the physician's warning had already been accomplished; the swoon of exhaustion that followed it; and then the stony heartless indifference that set in, as though Fabian was questioning the right of his Creator to leave him utterly friendless, or even the existence of a Creator at all, since He

had not interfered to prevent so awful a bereavement. The phases of great griefs bear a vast similarity to one another, and only differ with the temperaments that contend with them.

First comes the blow, next disbelief, then hardness and irreligious thoughts, to be succeeded by conviction, comprehension, compassion for ourselves, and the blessed healing tears which God sends like rain upon the parched ground to soften it and prepare it to bear again. In some natures this process takes a much longer time than in others, and leaves a much more permanent effect.

Père Raoul feared this might be the case with Fabian. The boy's mind had been so unnaturally forced by the hotbed in which it had been reared, that he felt—as he spoke—like a man.

When the first burst of his frenzied grief was over, he became stolidly indifferent, and would sit for hours silent and inactive, staring at the body of his father as it lay stretched in the coffin.

The services of the Church might have had a most beneficial and soothing effect upon the child's mind at this juncture, but Père Raoul had too much respect for M. Delacourt's last wishes to ask him to go to St. Joseph, and Fabian recoiled from the idea of leaving the darkened rooms to encounter the glare of day. So the hours went on till Delacourt's

body had been committed to the earth in the little Protestant burying-ground of Brusca, and then Père Raoul took Fabian's hand and explained to him the contents of the English letter and will which had been found in the artist's writing-desk.

"I think your dear father must have had some warning of his approaching end, Fabian, for this letter and will are dated only the day before it took place. Did he ever speak to you of his sister, your aunt, Mrs. Hayes?"

"Only that same night, just as I had returned from the opera. He said he had been thinking of her."

"He had probably but just finished writing the letter in which he commends you to her care."

"To her care! But of what use is that, when my aunt lives in England and I am in Brusca?"

"But it was your father's wish that in the event of his death you should leave Brusca, Fabian, and go and live with your aunt in England."

"Leave Brusca! go to England!"

For a moment the idea seemed too novel and sudden to the boy's understanding. But as he realised all that the change comprehended, the parting with his friends, the breaking up of old associations, the entrance upon a new life, a new country, and a new people, to whose names, customs, and lan-

guage he was a stranger, he broke forth into a bitter lament.

“Oh, I cannot leave Brusca. Oh father, do not let me go! I want to live and die here. I do not know them over there in England. I cannot even understand their language. I shall feel so utterly alone; and how can I leave you, and M. Fervier, and all the friends who knew and loved my father and have been so kind to me—and *him*, too? I feel as if, should I leave the place where he lies, I shall die of grief in longing to come back to it again.”

And Fabian cast himself across the couch on which he was seated in a paroxysm of despair. The priest laid his kind hand upon the boy's head in silence. He would gladly have undertaken the charge of him then and there, and offered him protection and a home as long as his own life should last; but the dead father's wishes must be first attended to, at whatever cost to Fabian or himself, and as soon as the child could attend to what was said to him, he made him acquainted with his thoughts.

“Fabian, my dear boy, it will give me as much pain to part with you as it will give you to leave Brusca. But you know well that your father is not here. You know that wherever you go you will not leave him behind you, and that if he be cognisant

of what you do and say, you cannot prove your love for him better than in following the last directions he left for your guidance."

"But to leave Brusca, father, to go to that cold, dark country, England, and amongst foreigners, whose customs I have heard my father say are so different from ours. It will break my heart to think that I shall never go to the *Marché aux Fleurs* again to select flowers for his grave; or attend mass at S. Joseph——"

But here Fabian stopped short, remembering that one of his father's last injunctions had been that he should not go to the services of the Catholic Church.

"My dearest boy," replied Père Raoul, "do you suppose I should not like to keep you here with me for ever? If it were possible to do so, it would give me the greatest pleasure on earth. You would be to me as a dear son, and I should see you grow up perhaps a good and great man to carry on your father's name and make it famous. But that could not be unless his wishes were first attended to. You never neglected them during his life, Fabian; and now that he is gone they must become a sacred duty to you."

"I know it, and I am ready; but it is very, very hard."

"The prospect is hard upon first sight, I acknowledge, but it may be the greatest blessing to you. Your aunt may prove a second mother; and you need a mother's care, Fabian."

"I have never felt the want of it yet," cried the boy.

"Well, then, you must thank God for the past, and trust him for the future. But it is clearly my duty and yours to forward this letter to England, and see what answer will be sent to it; we cannot be sure, you know, Fabian. It is so many years since your father communicated with his sister that she may not be able nor willing to receive you; and, should that be the case, you shall remain with me, and be my dear son as long as our lives may last."

With all his quickness, the boy was too young to inquire or even to care how he was to live in either case. All he thought of, for the present, was that he should have to leave the rooms which he had looked upon as home, and to part with the articles which his father had in daily use, and which had become precious to him on that account. So painfully did he appear to dread the wrench of separation, that Père Raoul had not the heart to suggest that hereafter they might have to be disposed of, but on the evening of the funeral he per-

suaded Fabian to go and sleep at his house, instead of occupying the gloomy old-fashioned apartments alone. Yet the next morning, missing the child as he returned from early service, he found that he had gone back to the old place, and was dusting and arranging the furniture, and filling the vases with flowers, just as though they would be seen and appreciated by other eyes than his own.

"It breaks my heart to see them empty, father," he said in answer to Père Raoul's look of surprise; "besides I want to carry the roses to the cemetery this evening, and I fancy he will like them better if they come from his own vases."

There was something so unnatural about the whole of the child's behaviour that the priest was scared.

"Fabian, my poor boy!" he said, pitifully, "can't you cry?" for the child had not shed a tear since Delacourt's death.

"No, father," he answered, shaking his head sadly, "because I cannot yet believe it. If he were to walk in this moment I should not be surprised. It is too sudden, too terrible, to understand that he is gone!"

But a higher Power sent the understanding that night. Père Raoul had officiated at his last service, and consumed his frugal supper of fish and salad,

before he walked round to Delacourt's rooms, for the third or fourth time that day, to try and induce Fabian to return home with him.

But the apartments were locked up, and Sophie informed him that "*ce cher Monsieur Fabian*" had left them about an hour previously, carrying the flowers with him. The priest guessed his destination. He had gone to strew them on his father's grave. He bent his steps to the cemetery in search of him.

It was a beautiful moonlight night at the close of September. The weather was still warm, and the open-air amusements continued without intermission. To gain the Protestant burying-ground, Père Raoul had to pass the outskirts of the park where he had last walked with Charles Delacourt. The rival bands at the Vauxhall and the Quinçonce were playing vigorously, through the trees shone the gleam of the many-coloured lamps, and the laughter and chatter of the audiences were distinctly audible. What difference did it make to the multitude that Delacourt, who had lately walked and talked amongst them, lay stiff and cold beneath the ground? They had been very much shocked to hear of his sudden death, but they had not relinquished a single amusement on that account. For whom does the world mourn? The deaths of our greatest rulers, most

glorious statesmen, or most valiant warriors, elicit but a few ordinary exclamations of surprise or regret, whilst as for the artists who amuse us, and ofttimes die from overworking the brains by which they do so, there are plenty to take their places and push their way to the front instead of them. The people longest remembered in this world are such as have lived by employing others, and the sincerest mourners those whose pockets remind them of the treasure snatched away by death.

Perhaps the very best instance of genuine sorrow extant is when the proprietor of a newspaper dies, or the manager of a theatre, and the whole staff is dismissed, or the company thrown out of work. *There* is real weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, if you like, but, *du reste*, the best wish we can form for ourselves is that, once freed from the self-delusion of this earth, we may never come back to prove how little all that we believed in whilst here was the truth.

Priests and doctors, who see so much of life and death, have less need to be surprised than the generality of men at the inconsistencies they meet with; yet Père Raoul felt the music and the laughter jar on his senses that night, and walked as quickly past them as he could.

But as he entered the little burying-ground he

found he had not outstripped them. The sweet soft strains of a band of stringed instruments floated to him on the evening air, sounding doubly sweet in that silent and sequestered spot. Wondering what effect the music would have on Fabian, the priest hastened his steps towards Delacourt's grave, where, as he had anticipated, he found his son. But no longer tearless. Flung across the rough mound of broken earth, the flowers he had so carefully cherished cast headlong on the ground, Fabian was pouring out his soul with all the vehemence of an unchastened nature. His face was hidden on his outstretched arms, and he was weeping loudly and unrestrainedly whilst his slender frame shook with the violence of his grief.

"Father! father! father!" he cried, raising his voice hysterically with each word; "come back to me, father! Come back, or I shall die."

CHAPTER IV.

A New Home for Fabian.

THE letter to his sister, containing Delacourt's last wishes respecting his son, enclosed in a courteous note from Père Raoul with the news of the artist's sudden death, reached Mordham on an early day in October, just as Farmer Hayes' family were about to sit down to dinner. Norfolk is not the warmest county in England, and Mordham was situated in the most exposed part of it, being close to the bleak east coast, and surrounded by salt marshes, which afforded no shelter to the village. The day was cold, dark, and lowering, but there was no fire in the long, ill-furnished room, in which the meal was spread; and the hands of a great overgrown lad, of about Fabian's age, who was leaning in a sulky attitude with both elbows on the table, were red and blue from the effects of the atmosphere. Near him, very primly and neatly attired, with her hair plaited tightly in two stiff tails down her back, sat a little girl about two years his junior. She was a pretty child, with large mournful black eyes and delicate features; but she had a cowed

and shrinking air about her, that contrasted painfully with her tender age. These two young persons were the only occupants of the dining-room, and were evidently waiting for their elders to commence the early meal. On the table before them was placed a huge leg of boiled pork, a dish of turnips, and another of potatoes, with a coarse country cheese and a home-made loaf—a dinner scarcely likely to provoke an appetite, unless it had been previously sharpened by the keen outer air. The little girl waited patiently enough, her childish eyes, that seem to hold a settled melancholy, fixed upon the bare wall opposite to her; but the boy, who had a bold cunning look about him, mingled with some amount of determination, kept kicking his roughly-shod feet against the floor and the rail of his chair, in expression of his impatience. In another minute their mother, Mrs. Hayes, had entered the room. Could Delacourt have carried out his intention to visit his sister before he died, he would hardly have recognised her. It was better he should go, remembering her only as the pretty girl, who clung round his neck and cried at parting, and had so much sympathy with all his tastes, artistic or otherwise.

Mrs. Hayes was something like what her brother had been. She had the same fair hair, plentifully

streaked with grey, the same hazel eyes, and delicately-moulded features. But she possessed none of the artist's independent daring. If it had ever existed in her spirit, she had parted with every outward trace of it. Bent and contracted in figure, as though she were always expecting to receive a blow; with hunted, frightened eyes, a thousand times more timid in expression than those of her little daughter, and a voice she scarcely ever raised above a whisper, Mrs. Hayes was a notable example of what a free-born woman can degenerate to when daily and hourly subjected to the brutality of a coarse and tyrannical nature. She had seen her firstborn die actually by his father's hand—killed by a passionate blow she had no power to prevent—yet she did all she could to hide the truth from her neighbours, and corroborate the report that her child was killed by falling from a window and striking his head against a stone. And still she had lived on with Henry Hayes, and borne him other children to replace the murdered son, whom he had forgotten, but whom she could never forget. There are some natures that have no physical power of resistance, but will sit down to receive the punishment they do not deserve, except for the cowardice that prevents retaliation. Metaphysically speaking, Mrs. Hayes was just such a meek, unresisting,

despicable character; for it is despicable when humility is permitted to merge into humiliation.

The little girl Emily appeared to have inherited all her mother's timidity; but the boy Andrew was a strange mixture of the disposition of both parents. He was bold, like his father, and sometimes he was cruel, for the force of example with children is very strong, and he had his little sister and his animals to practise upon. He was cunning, too, for the law of self-preservation had taught him that if he could not escape his father's harshness by straight running, he must give him the slip by "doubling." But beneath these unpleasant qualities there was a vein of sweetness in the character of Andrew Hayes—sweetness inherited from the mother's patient silence—that rendered him popular with such as came beneath its influence. His mother knew the tenderer phases of her boy's nature, and loved him passionately for them. Indeed, her affection for Andrew was the one great motive power of her existence. Else, what had she to live for? She could be of little use to poor Emily, who had no power to help herself. She could only look on and see her child suffer. But Andrew's boldness encouraged her own faint heart, and his mode of evading the father's injustice and cruelty excited her admiration. She overlooked, in consequence, the worst faults which

he displayed. She knew that on occasions he both lied and pilfered, but then, as she argued with herself, who could expect otherwise when the poor child was beaten for the most venial error, and often rose from table but half satisfied with what he had been permitted to eat. For, added to his other virtues, Farmer Hayes was parsimonious to a degree, and his servants and family were known to be the worst fed in the country.

As Mrs. Hayes entered the dining-room on the present occasion, her eyes first glanced fearfully round to note if her master (as the farm labourers truly denoted him) were present, and then, with a sigh of relief, she approached her children.

"Andrew, dear," she began, in so subdued a voice that only those who were used to hearing it could distinguish what she said, "had you not better go upstairs and brush your hair before your father comes in? It won't be above a minute before he's here, and he noticed yesterday that your head was rough."

"Well, let him notice then. I'll tell him to look after his own scrubbing-brush if he says anything to me. He can't quite take the skin off my back for a rough head. But I say, mother, are we to have this beastly salt pork for dinner again to-day? I'm sick of pork and turnips."

"It's not my fault, Andy dear, you know it isn't; but your father's been unlucky with the pigs this autumn, and he says we shan't have a bit of beef till this one is eaten, and it weighed six stone."

"And all because he killed it himself in a rage. I saw him do it. He wanted to change it to the other sty, and the brute wouldn't go the right way, so father seized a mallet, and hit it straight on the head and——"

"Stop, stop!" cried his mother, faintly; "don't go on, Andrew. It makes me sick. I cannot bear it."

"You are a chicken-hearted thing, mother," replied the boy, but not unkindly; "you're worse than Milly here, by long chalks."

"You don't know, Andy—you cannot understand," she said in the same voice.

"Well, can't we have dinner then? It's past one o'clock, and I promised to go rabbit-shooting with the Woods at two."

"Begin without your father! What are you thinking of, my boy? He'd never forgive us. Does he know you're going out shooting, Andrew?"

"Not he, and don't you peach, mother. But what can keep him so long to-day? I saw him in the three-acre field a hour ago, and had to come

all round by Fraser's Bottom for fear he should spot me."

"Here he is!" ejaculated Mrs. Hayes, quickly, as a heavy step was heard in the hall. "Sit up straight, Milly dear, and bid your father 'good-day' when he comes in, and do take your elbows off the table, Andy; I can't bear him to find fault with you so often."

The boy had scarcely complied with his mother's request when Farmer Hayes entered the room. He was a broadly-built, muscular man, of over fifty years of age, with small keen blue eyes, thick lips, a florid complexion, and a profusion of sandy hair and whiskers. He passed with strangers for rather a genial person than otherwise, and when everything went exactly as he desired it, Henry Hayes could make himself pleasant in a rough, uncertain sort of way. He was a great man amongst a small religious body, whose chapel he attended with his unhappy family twice every Sunday; and that sincere, respectable body of worshippers would have held up their hands in utter disbelief had anyone suggested to them that the well-to-do farmer, who subscribed to their charities, and held their plates with such a benevolent expression in his countenance, knocked about his little children for the most trifling error, and bullied his poor wife until life was

worth nothing to her. As he joined his family at dinner now, his face was on fire with indignation, notwithstanding the chilly day, and he held Charles Delacourt's letter crushed in his horny hand. But he sat down to the table without mentioning the cause of his annoyance. That would keep, and gather intensity with the duration of his reserve. It was the letter, in fact, that had delayed his return. The arrival of the post at Mordham was a very unusual occurrence, and the country servants, unable to decipher the inscription, had carried the important missive at once to their master, of whom, like the rest of the household, they stood considerably in awe. Mrs. Hayes' quick sight detected the letter and the thin material of which the paper was composed at a glance, and her curiosity was naturally excited; but she dared not ask a question concerning it until her "master" should moot the subject. The farmer, without a word of greeting (unless a growl in answer to poor little Milly's timid "good-day" could be interpreted as such), seated himself at the head of the table, and having flung pieces of pork into the various plates presented to him, helped himself, and fell-to with less ceremony than appetite. Meanwhile the children ate in silence, Milly pecking at her dinner like a little bird, and Andrew bolting his so as to get rid of it as speedily

as possible. Mrs. Hayes ate nothing, but her husband did not notice the circumstance. Perhaps it was too usual to be worthy of comment. But when he had satisfied his own cravings, he leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his waistcoat.

"I've had a letter," he commenced presently.

"Yes," replied his wife nervously.

"From that scamp of a brother of yours."

"*From Charles?*"

She could scarcely believe it. It was so many years since she had parted from her brother, and so complete a silence had intervened, that it was like a resurrection from the dead to hear that he still existed and wished to communicate with them. In a moment her thoughts had flown back to the time when she and Charles had been all in all to one another, and the colour rose to her face and the tears to her eyes with emotion. She tried to blink them away; but Henry Hayes saw them, and they evidently displeased him.

"From Charles!" she repeated, with an attempt to appear indifferent. "Really—after all this time—how strange!"

"Didn't I say it was from that scamp, Charles? Can't you hear me speak to you; or won't you take my word for it—eh?"

"Oh yes, Henry, of course; only it is such a

surprise. What does he say? May I see the letter?"

"You can read it if you like," he replied, throwing it across to her; "and there's some foreign humbug inside of it, which you may be able to make out, for I'm sure I can't. But look you here, Emily: don't get any rubbish into your head that either your brother, or the child he speaks of, are coming to Mordham; for, by the lord Harry, if he ever dares to show his nose here again I'll have him kicked into the road like a dog."

For the first time in her married life, perhaps, Mrs. Hayes was inattentive to what her husband said. The surprise and pleasure of hearing from her long-lost brother were so unexpected that her eyes were riveted upon the letter, and her understanding could only take in what she read there.

"Coming home!" she murmured; "coming back to see me after so many weary years! Dear, dear Charles, I knew he could not have forgotten me! I felt sure that if he were alive we should meet again——"

"Hang it all, madam!" exclaimed the farmer, bringing his fist down upon the table with a force that made the children jump in their chairs, and recalled her to the sad reality of life. "Have you gone stone deaf, or have you heard what I said to

you? Meet again! I tell you, you will not meet again. Your brother left my house in a most unseemly manner. He reviled the place and the people he met here, and chose to abandon our society for that of actors and actresses, and such low creatures. And as he made his choice so may he abide by it. I'll have neither himself nor his brat here, to turn the heads of our neighbours with their absurd, ill-fangled notions. There's no work for sign-painters in Mordham, and if there were, Mr. Charles Delacourt should not come and take the bread out of honest folks' mouths to fill that of a painter's brat."

Mrs. Hayes came back from dreamland with a shudder.

"Oh, Henry, pray don't speak like that. I am sure poor Charles means nothing but kindness to us both by this letter. And it all happened so long ago—so very, very long ago."

"Not so long but that I can remember it as plain as if it happened yesterday. And if I let you write back at all to him you'll write back as I tell you, that we are honest, God-fearing folk in these parts, and we don't want any foreigners or Papists here."

"Charles is not a Papist," she answered quickly.

"I don't know that! I don't like the look of his

writing on this paper, nor yet the French scrawl inside of his letter. Read it out, Emily, if you remember enough of such rubbish to be able to tell what it means. And first, who is it from?"

"It is from—I think it is from—a priest," she said, with much hesitation.

"A priest!" roared Hayes; "drop it at once. Take and put it on the kitchen fire—shove it in the water-butt. I won't have you look at it another moment."

"But, Henry, consider. It may contain news. Let me try and read it—though the writing is so crabbed I can hardly make it out."

His curiosity was excited as well as hers, and so he permitted her to go on with her attempted translation, whilst he drummed angrily with his fingers upon the table, and the boy and girl sat by in mute expectation of what might follow.

Mrs. Hayes's education, as may be supposed, had not been very extensive, and a long residence in Mordham had made her forget the little she had ever acquired. Her smattering of French would never have been equal to a quick rendering of Père Raoul's foreign characters into English; and now, what with nervousness, excitement, and want of practice, it was a long time before she could gain the slightest apprehension of what lay before her.

But there are some words which seem to stand out with fatal distinctness in every language, and she managed at last to understand what the priest had taken such pains to break to her gently—the intelligence that her brother was dead. The news came so abruptly upon the joyful surprise that Charles still remembered her that it was a double shock, and a low moan was the only means by which her husband was apprised that something was wrong.

“What’s up now?” he exclaimed roughly.

“Charles—Charles is gone—he is dead!” she answered, with a burst of tears.

The farmer scratched his head, and answered nothing. The announcement fell awkwardly after the abuse he had been levelling at the head of the defunct.

“Well, well,” he said, after a pause, “it can’t be helped, and I daresay it’s all for the best. At all events, you can’t pretend you’re head-over-ears in grief to hear it, when not a letter has passed between you for the last twenty years.”

“But the child, Henry—the poor boy! What is to become of him?”

Then Hayes recalled the contents of the English letter, and perceived the reason of those two epistles arriving together. They—someone—intended to put the child upon him for support. And he swore a

fresh oath that it should not be. Mrs. Hayes knew better than to try and persuade him to alter his mind. Only she wept on quietly, and asked what was to become of her poor brother's son. What was to become of him?

"Well, he isn't coming here," growled the farmer, "so you may make up your mind about that. Haven't you got enough trouble with your own children—with that lout of a boy there, with his elbows on the table, and his hair all over his eyes?"

"Why don't you give me a brush and comb then?" interpolated Andy, without any regard to the seriousness of the subject under discussion.

"Hold your tongue, sir; don't dare to interrupt me, or I'll thrash you," said his father. "Haven't you got enough to do, I repeat, with those unruly brats, that you should want to bring a half-bred, French, frog-eating, Papistical young hound here to take the bread out of their mouths? And you call yourself a mother—bah!"

"Of course he can't come here—I am quite aware of that," she replied, in a low voice; "but it seems a pity. My own brother's child—and with all that money too!"

"*What?*" demanded Hayes, his attention immediately arrested.

"The money poor Charles has saved for him,

and the interest is to remunerate whoever may give him a home until he is twenty-one. It will go to this French priest, I suppose, as he says that, if we cannot take the boy, he will do so himself."

"And what did you mean by not telling me so before? What do you mean by keeping back things in this way? Do you wish to deceive me, madam, or to follow the example of that scoundrel of a brother of yours, and insult me to my face?"

"Oh, Henry, pray don't be so angry with me. I had not time to translate the letter before, and poor Charles mentions the fact of the money in his."

"Give it to me," he said roughly, as he seized Delacourt's letter from her hand, and walked out of the room with it. As soon as he had disappeared, Mrs. Hayes sank down upon a chair, and burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears. The little girl slipped down from her seat and laid her cheek against her mother's, whilst Andrew gave her three or four hearty caresses on the other side.

"Don't cry, mother. It won't do any good, and maybe he'll hear you. Who was my Uncle Charles? Were you fond of him? And why have we never heard his name before to-day?"

"Oh, I was very, *very* fond of him, Andy, he was my only brother, and I nearly broke my heart when he went to live in France. But your father

and he had a great quarrel, and he left us in a rage, and so I wasn't allowed to write to him, and I almost thought he must be dead until I received that letter. But now that I hear he *is* dead, I know how much I have clung to the hope that some day he might come back and—and make things better for us all here."

"No one could do that," replied the boy, gloomily, "not while father is alive. I wish he was dead instead of Uncle Charles, I do!"

"Oh no, Andy dear. Don't say that—because he is your father, remember—and you must try to love him."

"It's all very well to say 'try,' mother, but no one could do it, and you know it as well as I do. I pity the other poor chap if he comes here too. Will father let him come, mother?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I should say no, at once, only there's the money, you see, and it may make a difference with him. But—only that I should like to have poor Charles's son to look after and to love—I could almost wish your father would refuse to receive him, Andy."

"Won't he get licked if he does come," said the boy, with glee at the prospect of a companion in misfortune.

"But you'll be kind to him, Andy, my darling,

won't you, for my sake, and try to save him from getting into scrapes? It will all be very strange to him at first, and doubtless he has been brought up very differently, but we'll do the best we can for him, my boy, won't we?"

"Yes, mother, we will," he replied warmly; for the lad loved and pitied his mother, notwithstanding his somewhat cruel and heartless disposition.

"Mamma, mamma! here's father coming back again," said little Milly, in a frightened whisper, as she crept back to her chair.

"Well, what are you all doing here still, idling the whole day away?" exclaimed Farmer Hayes, as he reappeared on the threshold. "Is there no work to be done on a big place like this that you can afford to sit cuddling up that lout, Andrew, whilst the maids and the kitchen, and all the lot of it, may go to rack and ruin? Here you, sirrah!"—(to the boy)—"be off at once to the three-acre lot, and tell Simpson to set you to work on the turnips. I'll be down there myself in ten minutes, so no shirking. And you, you little fool"—(to the girl)—"go to your work or your dame's school. And now, Emily, when do you mean to answer this letter?"

"Whenever you please, Henry."

"Well, get out your pen and ink then, and write

it off this afternoon; and then I can see it when I come in this evening."

"And what am I to say?"

"Say! Why, that your brother was good for nothing, and we owe him little enough duty—or anything else—but that we are God-fearing people down in these parts; and if the boy has got no friends, and the money's all secure, we'll take him in till he can do for himself. But, mind you, no humbug. The five thousand pounds must be an assured thing before the brat shows his ugly face in at my doors. And when the French mounseer, whoever he is, can make that all plain to us, he can send him over, and not before. Take care he understands that!"

"I will take care," she answered humbly.

"And now a word for yourself. I won't have any more of this snivelling about the house, so you'd better stop it. I'm going to do a very kind thing to you in having your brother's brat to live with us, and you'd better be grateful, or I'll turn him out again. But, until I have some security for the money, he don't put his foot in Mordham—make that plain."

"It seems all straightforward enough, Henry."

"It had better be—for both your sakes. And now oblige me by putting that handkerchief away,

and looking round the place a bit. I marked eighteen hens in the yard that had laid this morning, and five were on the nests. That's twenty-three eggs; mind you get them. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to leave such things to me. It's a woman's work, and not a man's."

"You would find it all right if you would but trust me, Henry. And I don't think the poultry-woman would cheat us."

"*You don't think!* You ought to *know*. But it was never of any use speaking to you, and it never will be. Where's that boy?"

"You sent him to the three-acre field to await your coming."

"And he'd better do it, or I'll know the reason why," said the farmer, as he quitted the house again.

"*Won't* he get licked?" exclaimed a voice from under the table, as soon the room was cleared.

"Andy, are you there?" said his mother in consternation. "Oh run, my boy, run to the three-acre field before your father gets down, or he'll thrash you as sure as you live. Oh Andy, do be good; it breaks my heart to see him thrash you. The blows seem as though they came down on myself. And

you are so bold, you defy him so. It frightens me out of my life to think what will come of it."

"Don't you be so scared, mother. If he does thrash me, what matters? I'd rather be flogged than miss the rabbit-shooting. Wasn't it a lark? Whilst he was hammering away at you I crept under the table, and he walked off, as grand as the beadle at the parish church."

"Andy, some day there'll be something serious happen between your father and you."

"I shouldn't wonder—murder, may be; and then I'll swing for it, and it will be over. But, mother, I say, this chap as is coming. If father begins any of his tricks with him, he'll kill him. It's only those that have been brought up to it like me that can stand it."

"I hope he'll be good and obedient, and there'll be no need to punish him. Your father would be kinder to you if you were a better boy, Andy."

"Oh, would he! Why isn't he kind to you then, mother, who daren't say *bo* to a goose? He treats you a deal worse than he does me. Truth now, isn't it?"

"Well, it will be all over some day," replied Mrs. Hayes, with a deep sigh, as she passed into the kitchen department; and her boy scudded off like a

wild rabbit to join his young friends in their forbidden excursion. And this was the home to which Delacourt's short-sighted love had doomed his delicate and sensitive Fabian.

CHAPTER V.

A Cold Journey.

THE letter which Henry Hayes dictated to his wife, and compelled her to send in answer to that of Père Raoul, conveyed no meaning to the priest's mind but one: that Fabian's relations were as much distressed at the sad news of Delacourt's death as they were delighted to offer a home and parental care to his orphan child. It was the farmer's cupidity that had caused this falsehood to be written. His first feeling had been to repudiate all idea of duty or inclination in the matter; but, on second thoughts, the interest of Fabian's five thousand pounds had carried the day. Besides, there was no saying, the boy might not live to attain his majority, for the Delacourts had always been an overstrung and somewhat sickly race; in which case, he presumed his money would revert to his father's sister.

Poor Mrs. Hayes had shed many tears over the epistle she was forced to write. She knew its promises and expressions of interest were untrue, and she trembled for the future of poor Charles's son.

She would have loved to take Fabian in her arms and be a second mother to him; but how could she, who was too much afraid to caress her own children except in secret, hope to be permitted to exercise any tenderness towards the orphaned stranger. She could almost have found it in her heart to pray that something might intervene to prevent Fabian going to Mordham, or even to enclose a word of warning in her letter to Père Raoul, had it not been for her ignorance concerning what life might await her nephew in Brusca, and her desire to be of use to the child of a brother from whom she had been so long parted, but whom she had never forgotten. It must be confessed that the good priest felt some disappointment at the reception of her decision. He did not dare regret that Fabian's uncle and aunt were willing and eager to receive him; but had they decided otherwise, he would have been only too glad to be able to adopt the boy, and rear him as his own son. But when Fabian had had Mrs. Hayes' letter translated to him, and was made to understand that, on the first available opportunity he would have to join his father's relations in England, his grief was uncontrollable.

None of the curiosity or excitement usually felt by the young on visiting a new country mingled with his regrets. He could think of nothing except that

he must leave Brusca, his father's grave, and the friends who had been so kind to him. Père Raoul reasoned with the child in vain; and at last decided that, at all events, he should not travel to Norfolk until he himself could take him there. The business connected with his little colony of emigrants to Batavia often required the priest's presence in London; and the Hayes' received an intimation to the effect that, on the occasion of his next visit to England, Fabian Delacourt should be delivered over to their care.

This visit did not occur until the close of November, and the commencement of one of the hardest winters known for some years past. The climate of Brusca was cold enough during the winter season, but the air was never damp. Bright frosty days, enlivened by sunshine, and bringing with them huge sheets of ice which had been known to bear for six weeks together, usually rendered Christmas in Brusca the merriest and healthiest time of the year. Furs and skates were in general requisition, but umbrellas and respirators were almost unknown. To Fabian, therefore, a fog was a revelation, and his horror and astonishment at the one they encountered on their arrival in London would have been comical excepting for the sadness of the circumstances attending them. There was nothing to

detain them in the fog. Père Raoul's business only occupied a few hours, and on account of Fabian's recent bereavement they did not of course think of attending any place of amusement. The third day of their arrival in England, therefore, found them on their way to Mordham. Fabian had by this time somewhat recovered the shock of his father's death. Neither old nor young can grieve for ever, or not, at all events, in proportion to the first great outburst of their sorrow.

It is true that his lip still trembled when alluding to Delacourt, but he could speak of him, and often conversed at great length with Père Raoul about the old days and the happy life he had spent in them. All the large or cumbrous property his father had left behind him had been sold for Fabian's benefit, but he had brought over with him two or three of the artist's best paintings, his cherished violin—a real Cremona, for which Delacourt had paid a fabulous sum—and the large silver-chased bowl which had been his special favourite, and which the boy had been used to keep filled with flowers for him all the year round.

These treasures, with the exception of the violin-case (which Fabian never let out of his own hands), were packed with the lad's wardrobe, which was large and costly, but utterly unfitted for the scenes

to which it was about to be introduced; as unfitted as poor Fabian was for a life spent amongst the coarse usages of a farmer's home. The foreign character of the deep mourning garb he wore had already excited some rude remarks in the streets of London, but to these the boy, not being able to understand the language they were expressed in, was fortunately indifferent, and the priest had not cared to render him conscious of ridicule. But coming as they did as a foreshadowing of what might be in store for Fabian, it made Père Raoul tremble (as Mrs. Hayes had trembled) to think of the future of the sensitive and delicate child. The priest had received no invitation to Mordham, in answer to his offer to take Fabian there, and under other circumstances he would have hesitated to thrust his company where it might possibly not receive a welcome. But he felt it was his duty no less than his inclination not to lose sight of the boy until he had placed him in the charge of his aunt, added to which he had a curiosity to judge for himself what sort of life his dear little friend was likely to lead in his new home. Accustomed as he was to the elegance and refinement which seem to pervade the poorest of continental *ménages*, Père Raoul had little idea of the scenes he was about to witness. It was in the days when the railroad did not extend farther

than Norwich, and having reached that point the travellers were compelled to proceed to Mordham by coach. Considering the inclemency of the weather, the priest had secured two inside places for himself and Fabian, but even with that precaution the cold was extreme. Snow had fallen heavily the night before, and the vehicle laboured through a country, the landmarks of which were blotted out by the veil that had covered everything like a crust of unbroken whiteness, except where the cart-wheels had left hard brown tracks behind them, over which the laden coach jolted uneasily. They had started from Norwich at twelve, and hoped to reach their destination about four in the afternoon. But the state of the country prevented punctuality. It was five o'clock before they gained the nearest post town to Mordham, and then, after a great deal of colloquy and misunderstanding on both sides, Père Raoul discovered that there was no public conveyance to be hired to take them to their destination, and that it was always usual for the people thereabouts to send their own gigs or carriages to meet the travellers by the coach. In his ignorance of English manners and customs, the priest had omitted to write and ask Mr. Hayes to arrange such matters for them, and now found himself and his charge stranded amongst a people speaking a barbarous tongue (as

the broad Norfolk dialect appeared to him), and without any means of accomplishing their journey that night. He told Fabian of their dilemma, but he seemed quite indifferent to it. The fact was the poor little boy was almost too miserable and too fatigued to care for any further misfortune. Shrivelled up with the cold that had seized upon his delicate frame with an intensity that was pain, and tired out by the long uncomfortable journey, he had great trouble to restrain the tears he would have been ashamed to shed. But the good father went on wrestling with the difficulty and the dialect, until at last by some happy accident the innkeeper caught the name of Hayes, and made out that it was to his house the "furriners" wished to be conveyed. Upon which, by means of many signs and words, that sounded like no English Père Raoul had ever heard before, he managed to convey to him the intelligence that a cart belonging to Farmer Hayes was standing in his yard at that very moment and about to start upon its homeward journey. A cart or carriage was all the same to Père Raoul. It meant something to travel to Mordham in, and he communicated the news at once to Fabian.

"*Courage, mon petit,*" he exclaimed, encouragingly, "here is a vehicle that will take your box and yourself to the very door of the good aunt's house,

and if it be a little rough, it matters nothing after the jolting we have already sustained in the coach."

"But you will come with me, father," said Fabian, nervously.

"Without a doubt, my child; but," he continued after a moment's pause, laying his hand affectionately on the boy's curls, "you must learn not to depend upon me, Fabian. At the most I can but remain with you a few hours longer. You must think of God and of your poor dead father, my boy, and be patient for the sake of the first, and a man for the sake of the second."

But the school in which Fabian had been reared, a school of sensuous excitement, although it had made him precocious, was the least fitted to render him manly. He knew a dozen things of which Andrew Hayes had not the least idea, but Andrew would have borne hard fare and inclement weather, a blow or a separation, better than Fabian had the physical power to do. He had far more moral courage than most boys of his age, but his delicate constitution was sadly against the display of mere animal heroism.

When Farmer Hayes' cart was produced, it proved to be a two-wheeled tumbril which had come to the town that afternoon with sacks of wheat, and was about to return, except for the canvas bags

that strewn the bottom, empty. It was a coarse, uncomfortable, lop-sided sort of conveyance, but the priest thought it would be foolish not to take advantage of it; and Fabian and he were soon jolting towards Mordham, in company with the box and a rough terrier who stood at bay upon the empty sacks and barked defiance at everything they passed upon the road. It was now getting dusk, and the surrounding country could hardly be distinguished. It looked bare and bleak enough, however, as the cart and horses took their way along what appeared to be an interminable narrow lane with a formal close-cut hedge on either side, enclosing useful but most un-ornamental fields of turnips.

In the fast gathering dusk, Père Raoul felt Fabian's slight form press closer to him and a hand slipped in his arm. The boy's courage, which had been sorely tried during the day, was fast evaporating. His dread of a new life before him, and the prospect of a speedy separation from his kind friend, no less than the discomfort of their present situation, was too much for his equanimity. With a hand trembling from the cold, he had already brushed away more than one hot tear from his eyes, and all his childish hope was that he might not disgrace his father's name by breaking down before his unknown relatives. Père Raoul guessed what

was passing in the boy's mind, but he would not encourage the feeling, for should Fabian give way, he was too much afraid of his own heroism following suit. So he spoke to him as cheerfully as possible.

"I wonder what our good friends in Brusca would think if they could see us jolting along in the dark like this. But the 'doom braile' (as I think the master of the inn called it) is not such an uneasy conveyance, Fabian, although in appearance it is rather rough. They live in a freer, more manly atmosphere in England than we do abroad. Next time I see you, *cher enfant*, you will be riding bare-back on one of these great Norfolk horses, and leaping with a pole perhaps, as we saw the boys do as we came along. England is a great country for *le sport*."

"You *will* come and see me, dear father, will you not?" said Fabian, earnestly.

"Certainly I will, on the very next opportunity of my visiting the country. I shall not know you again, Fabian, I expect. In place of this white thin boy, I shall look to find a rosy-faced, stout fellow, with well-covered limbs and muscles of iron. There are no men like the English men for strong arms and red faces."

This idea set the poor child off laughing.

"I do not want to have a red face, *mon père*, nor yet a strong arm, unless it be to defend others. But a strong heart, that is what I most need just now," he added, in a mournful tone.

"Pray to Heaven, and it will be given you, Fabian. And never forget one thing—that happiness comes to us not from what we receive, but from what we give. Do your duty, whatever it may be; and though you may lack many things, you will gain peace. I do not expect you will be quite happy at first, my dear boy. Everything and everybody will be strange to you, and you will not feel quite at your ease. But what a blessing to think that you are going to the care, not of aliens, but of your father's sister—the sister whom he loved so much when he was young, and thought of the last thing before death took him from us. Never forget that, Fabian, and be very good and dutiful to your aunt for his sake. She is the same flesh and blood as your father. Try to hear him speaking to you through her lips, and honour her as if she were your mother."

"I will, *mon père*, indeed I will!"

"And *du reste*, I shall hope to receive a letter from you sometimes, and to hear that you are very happy running about the beautiful country with your

cousins, whom Madame Hayes said would be as a brother and sister to you."

"But how can that be, when I cannot even understand what they say to me? And I shall never learn English, *mon père*, it is so difficult. My tongue will not form the words," said the boy, despairingly.

"Nonsense, Fabian. Now you speak like a little child who has no understanding. What! you have learned to play the violin, which is the most difficult instrument we possess, and to speak German, and to do half-a-dozen other things, and you will let your father's native language frighten you."

"But to learn the violin seemed so easy when M. Samuel would play the passages I found most difficult over and over again for me on his own instrument—as easy as to mix my colours after I had watched dear father mix his every day. And as for the German, *mon père*, you must remember our old Sophie was a German, and spoke as often to me in that language as in French."

"Well, and your uncle and aunt and cousins will speak to you in English, until you have forgotten both the others."

"Oh, never! never!"

"I anticipate it, Fabian, and that by this time next year you will know more about English farm-

ing and what they call in their tongue 'the crops,' than of painting or the violin. But remember that, whatever you forget, you must not forget me, your old friend in Brusca."

But this subject was one fraught with so much melancholy reminiscence that, had not the tumbril performed by that time its journey to Mordham, the discussion must have proved fatal to the studied calmness of both the travellers. Before they had had time, however, to indulge in it, the cart gave a sharp turn, which almost unseated them, and having jolted violently for a few seconds over a roadway of stones (the paved courtyard, in fact, attached to Farmer Hayes' stables) came to a dead stop.

"Are we arrived?" demanded Père Raoul in English, as perfectly unintelligible to the carter who had driven them, as his answer was to the priest. "I think this must be the end of our journey, though I cannot understand what the man says," he continued to Fabian. "But I see a house here, so let us get down, *mon cher*, and inquire if I am right."

They tumbled out of the cart, and made their way to what proved to be the door of the farm-kitchen. There was a bright large fire burning within, which looked very inviting to the half-frozen travellers; for though Farmer Hayes was so niggardly with regard to the comforts of his own family, his

servants did not fall into his views, unless they were absolutely obliged. Three or four red-cheeked and bare-armed Norfolk wenches were stirring about the kitchen, but in answer to the priest's polite inquiry (prefaced by removing his broad-brimmed hat), whether he was in the house of "Monsieur Hayes," they only stared at him and laughed. A boy was sitting in front of the fire, munching bread and cheese, which he had surreptitiously procured from the larder, and at first he joined the general ridicule.

"My eye, what a guy!"

If the strangers could have understood the uncomplimentary nature of the remark, they might have felt hurt; but as it was High Dutch to them they were spared the annoyance. Fabian, with his long curls falling over a black cloak, that almost covered him to the feet, and blue with the cold, was gazing wistfully at the blazing fire, whilst the benevolent priest, still with his head uncovered, was striving earnestly to make himself understood.

"We have come a long way to see a Monsieur and Madame Hayes," he went on, "who are the sole relations of this poor child, this little boy, who calls himself Fabian Delacourt."

"Hullo!" cried young Andrew, startled by the name! "do you mean to say this is Uncle Charles's

boy? Mother's been expecting him ever so long; and she said she thought he might come to-day or to-morrow. But I say, what a miserable-looking little beggar he is."

Père Raoul, catching the import of his speech sufficiently to understand that he had rightly surmised the house they stood in to belong to Mr. Hayes, bowed again and smiled.

"It is Fabian Delacourt, your cousin, whom I have brought to live with you and your good mother. We could procure no conveyance at the next town, and were obliged to come on in a cart belonging to your good father, Monsieur Hayes."

"Don't the poor chap look cold?" cried Andy. "Here, I say, come nearer to the fire, what's-your-name, and warm yourself. You're as blue as a badger."

He pulled Fabian by the hand as he spoke, roughly, but not unkindly, and brought him forward. The boy looked in his cousin's face. He did not quite comprehend yet that he was his cousin, but he could translate the kindly feeling pictured there, and be grateful for it. He held out both his hands, and grasped Andrew's fervently, and with that action the first token was given of a friendship that was to last till death. There stood the heroes of this story—Andrew Hayes and Fabian Delacourt,

The priest turned to his *protégé* and told him who his companion was—then to young Hayes:

“Your cousin cannot yet speak English well, my child. He understands a word here and there, but not readily. But if you will be patient with him he will learn soon enough, for he is very skilful.”

“*I’ll* teach him,” exclaimed Andy, as he nodded in Fabian’s face. The answer the foreign-bred child made to this token of friendliness was to throw his arms round his cousin’s neck and kiss him affectionately, at which ebullition of feeling Andrew reddened like a turkey-cock, and the maids laughed outright. But though Andrew was ashamed he would not permit his inferiors to ridicule him.

“Stop that row!” he exclaimed, angrily, and then, as the servants slunk out of the kitchen, he turned his flushed face to Père Raoul.

“You’d better come and see mother before father comes home, sir, for he’s a difficult one to deal with, I can tell you. This is only the kitchen, you see. If you’ll follow me to the parlour I’ll call mother and let her know that you’ve arrived. Come on, little chap!” he continued to Fabian. “Lor! what a gal you do look with those long curls. They’ll be in the dust-bin to-morrow though, I warrant.”

He pulled his cousin after him to the comfortless sitting-room of the family, where, as it happened,

they found Mrs. Hayes and Emily trying to work by the light of two tallow candles. The farmer was fortunately absent, and not expected home for another hour, having attended a cattle sale some twelve miles distant the same day.

"Here, mother," was Andrew's gruff introduction, "here's Uncle Charles's boy, and a man that's brought him over here; and he can't speak a word of English, and wears long hair like a girl, and I expect he'll have a nice time of it altogether."

Mrs. Hayes uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise, and starting forward, took Fabian in her arms and kissed him tenderly—just as she used to kiss Emily when she knew the coast was clear. She cried over him, too, and murmured several times, "My poor brother, my poor dear brother!" And then she drew him to the miserable light, and gazed into his delicate face and mournful eyes (so like her own) and kissed him over again, not once, but a dozen times, whilst Père Raoul stood by, delighted at the welcome his dead friend's son had received, and Fabian returned his aunt's caresses with fervour. At last Mrs. Hayes had time to notice the stranger's presence.

"Oh, monsieur, I am afraid you must think me very rude not to have spoken to you before, but

poor Charles was very dear to me—very, very dear, and——”

“Pray do not apologise, madame. It is only too much pleasure for me to see the reception you accord to Fabian. He is a dear and good child, and will reward all your care.”

Père Raoul then proceeded to give her details of their journey, and his account of their trouble in getting there brought a perplexed look to her countenance.

“They must be hungry,” she thought, “as well as cold and tired. Run, Andrew,” she continued to her son, “and tell Mary to bring in whatever we may have in the larder, that this dear child may have some supper—at once, my boy, you understand!” And then she followed him to the door. “Make them be quick, Andy, that it may all be cleared away again before your father comes in.”

“Oh, what will he say to the presence of this good man? I quite tremble to think of it!”

“You will soon have something to eat, dear,” she said, as she returned to Fabian’s side, “and then if you are tired you had better go to bed and see your uncle in the morning.” Still her anxiety was to get the priest out of the way before Hayes’ return.

"Where do you propose to sleep, monsieur?" she continued, addressing Père Raoul.

The poor man had nothing to say in answer. He had got to Mordham under the greatest difficulties, and had no idea how he was to make his way out of the place again. He had hoped, of course, that Fabian's relations would have at least offered him a bed for the night, but this hope was dispelled by Mrs. Hayes' words. He stammered and grew confused. Delacourt's sister read his difficulty, but dared not help him out of it. She knew that her husband would consider the roof defiled for evermore that had once sheltered a Roman Catholic priest.

"Is there any inn here, madame?" he demanded.

"None! Mordham is but a small village. I am troubled to know what to do for you."

Fabian saw their mutual perplexity, and guessed the import of their conversation.

"Père Raoul can sleep with me," he said eagerly, in his broken tongue.

The priest shook his head, smiling.

"I think not, Fabian," he answered.

"I wish I could keep you, at least for the night," murmured Mrs. Hayes, with a heightened colour; "you would have been so welcome, monsieur, after all your kindness to—to my poor brother and

his son; but—— how can I tell it you? My husband is rather prejudiced against your religion. He is what we term a Dissenter, and——”

“Say no more, madame,” interposed Père Raoul. “I would not be the cause of any unpleasantness for the world. Since I have delivered Fabian into your care I will withdraw myself, and see if it is not possible to procure a lodging for the night at some house in the village.”

“But you must have some supper, indeed, before you go,” she said, hastily, as a servant entered with a tray containing cold meat, bread and cheese, and a tankard of ale. “I could not allow you to quit the farm without any refreshment.”

The priest was only too ready to accept her offer, and he knew that Fabian stood much in need of sustenance. He drew near to the table therefore, and although the fare was coarse, fell to with a good appetite. But with the boy it was otherwise. Used to the most refined, if not the daintiest dishes, poor Fabian’s senses recoiled from the strong-smelling cheese and the bitter beer. He attempted to eat, playing with the food before him; whilst little Emily, with her large dark eyes fixed upon his face and strange attire, sat in the chair next to him, watching each movement with the greatest interest. But suddenly the noise of wheels was heard ap-

proaching the hall-door, and Mrs. Hayes jumped up from her seat with an exclamation of fear. Her face blanched, and her mouth quivered—it was thus she greeted the arrival of her lord. An oath or two was delivered at the stableboy's head, then the door opened and slammed, and a clumsy footstep crossed the hall.

"It is my husband," ejaculated Mrs. Hayes, faintly. Then, as though remembering herself, she turned to Fabian: "Mind you're not frightened, dear. Your uncle is a little rough, but he doesn't mean it; and if you're a good boy he'll be very kind to you. Put your chair farther away, Milly, and sit up nicely; and, oh dear, where is Andy? Milly, when everything is quiet again, slip out of the room, there's a dear child, and tell your brother that his father has come home."

And so the little party, some trembling, and some surprised, awaited the entrance of the master of the house.

CHAPTER VI.

Welcome to England.

His negotiations at the cattle sale that day had not been successful, and Farmer Hayes was in a worse temper even than usual. A shorthorn bull, upon which he had set his agricultural heart, was actually sold before he reached the spot; and seven out of the dozen oxen he had sent there had been driven back to the farm again. Luck appeared to have been against him on that occasion, and he had forgotten all about the honest "God-fearing folk," more than once during the afternoon, when he felt inclined to drive a good round oath at his herdsman's head, or to curse his own stupidity for not being at the sale in better time. And now he had returned home, cold, out of temper, and having imbibed a considerable amount of liquor, to find a Popish priest sitting at his table, and an addition to his family in the shape of a boy dressed like a girl, and who could hardly string two words of English together. There was insult marked upon every feature of Mr. Hayes' common face as he strode into the parlour and caught sight of the strangers.

"Whom have we here?" he exclaimed loudly, only let it be observed that he prefaced the question with an oath that is too coarse to be transcribed.

Mrs. Hayes, trembling in every limb, tried to cover his brutality by ignoring it.

"This is my brother's little boy, Henry," she said with affected ease, "whom you were so good as to offer a home to. And this gentleman has been kind enough to bring him to Mordham. They appear to have had a most uncomfortable journey. Fancy, they travelled from Blakeney here in the wheat-cart. It was lucky it went in to-day, wasn't it?"

"Well, I suppose they have got legs to walk with, if it hadn't gone. Five miles is not such a distance that one need sit down and cry over it. Who is this person?" nodding in the direction of Père Raoul, who had risen from his seat and was waiting for a formal introduction.

"Oh Henry, he is the gentleman who wrote to me about poor Charles's death. You remember, don't you? We had a letter saying that he would bring Fabian to England with him next time he came over."

"Is this the Popish priest that wrote to you?"

"Hush! Yes, Henry. He has been good enough to bring the boy, at great trouble to himself."

"I wonder at his impudence, showing his face in my house at all. Hark'ee, sir," continued the farmer, turning his bloated face to the priest; "do you know who I am?"

"Oh, pray, pray, Henry, don't!"

"I'm an honest, God-fearing Christian, sir, and we don't countenance anything like falling down to stocks and stones in Mordham. It would have been more decent on your part if you had sent Mrs. Hayes's nephew to us by himself than intruded a member of your idolatrous faith in a respectable household like mine."

"I am very sorry I should have so intruded, monsieur, but I did it for the child's sake. I cannot, however, remain here another moment after the remarks you have just made. I could have borne an insult to myself, but not one to my Church and my religion."

"And what is your religion but idolatry, twist and turn it as you will? Don't you stick up images in all your churches and teach your people to pray to them? Can't they commit any sin they choose and pay a shilling to get quit of it? Don't you make a woman the head of heaven and say that no one can be saved unless they believe in her?"

"Non, non! ce n'est pas vrai!" cried Fabian, vehemently.

His denial, though given in a language Hayes could not understand, was sufficiently evident from his flashing eyes filled with tears, and the energy with which he grasped Père Raoul's hand. It served to turn the farmer's attention to himself.

"What do you say, you young cub? Are you daring to cheek me already? You'd better try it, that's all. I'll soon teach you a different story. I see which way the land lies by the manner in which you cling to that Popish impostor. You've been sucking in all the lies he's told you till you're next door to a Papist yourself. And, if that's the case, you and I will have a reckoning to settle together, young master, and if I don't larrup your nonsense out of you, my name's not Hayes. We'll have no Jesuits or worshipping of images in Mordham, and that I can tell you."

Fabian could not follow the meaning of his uncle's thick and angry utterances, but the priest, who saw his fear at the altercation, and was most desirous to make peace for him if possible, replied to the farmer's words.

"I pass over your unjust comments on the Catholic faith and practice, monsieur, because you speak in ignorance and of what you know nothing; but for

the sake of this child, let me tell you that he has never received the least tuition with regard to the ordinances of the Church. On the contrary, far from being a Jesuit, it was one of his father's dying wishes, expressed to me, that Fabian should be reared in the same faith as himself."

"Of course. I was sure dear Charles would wish it to be so," said Mrs. Hayes, tearfully. "We have all been Protestants, and naturally—however good your religion may be, monsieur—Mr. Hayes would have an objection to Fabian being anything else."

"Hold your tongue," interrupted her husband, rudely. "If your brother, who was the greatest scamp——"

"Monsieur," cried the priest, "I must implore you—in the presence of his son——"

"I should say what I know to be the case, mounseer, if it was in the presence of twenty of his sons. *I'm* not a sneaking, hypocritical, lying Papist——"

"Henry, for Heaven's sake!" interposed his wife, imploringly.

"I'm an upright, God-fearing Christian, that's what I am, and I shall say what I choose. None of your bobbing and bowing to stones for me," continued the farmer, who, betwixt bad temper and good ale, was becoming rather mixed in his ideas.

"And what I say is, down with Popery, and if the brat there had been baptised seven times in the river Jordan—no, I don't mean that—I mean by the Popish priests, I'd drag him through our horse-pond till he was clean again. Hang your brother, madam! He was as great a scoundrel——"

"I can listen to this no longer, madame, you must permit me to retire," exclaimed Père Raoul, angrily.

"Oh, *mon père*, take me with you," cried Fabian, frightened out of his wits, as he flung himself into the father's arms.

"It is impossible, Fabian, but listen to me; I am always your friend, and should you ever need a friend, remember my words. Madame, I thank you for your hospitality. Be good to this poor orphan for his father's sake."

"Oh monsieur, you cannot leave us on this inclement night, and without a house to go to."

"I could not stay, madame, one moment longer than is necessary, after the insults monsieur has thought fit to level at the Church and my dead friend. I would sooner sleep in the snow."

"And you should, before you got a bed under my roof," interrupted Hayes, coarsely. "If ever I let a knee-scraping, mumbling, idolatrous——"

"Silence!" cried Père Raoul, authoritatively. He

was a little man, but he rose to his full height as he spoke, and the majesty of his voice was such that the big, half-intoxicated bully shrank before it and was dumb. In the interval that succeeded, the priest left the room with Fabian still clinging to his hand, and Mrs. Hayes accompanying him to open the hall door. She was sobbing so bitterly with shame at what had passed that she could scarcely speak to him, but before he passed over the threshold she just managed to whisper:

"Forgive what has happened, monsieur, and don't think the worse of me. I will love Fabian, do not doubt it. And go to the farm on the left, say you come from me—their name is Barnes. I hope they may be able to give you shelter for the night."

"Thank you, madame, and may God bless and comfort you," replied Père Raoul. "Fabian, my son, be good, be patient, and reward your aunt's care;" and so saying, he passed out into the bitter night. As the door closed after him, Fabian felt Mrs. Hayes's arms thrown around him.

"Come," she whispered beneath her breath, as she led him past the parlour door and into the lighted kitchen, which was at the end of a long stone passage. Her eyes were red and inflamed with weeping, but she took no heed of that. She had ceased to be ashamed of what was an everyday

occurrence. As they entered the kitchen, Fabian saw his cousin Andy seated at a side table, devouring bread and jam.

"Wasn't there a jolly row?" he called out as his mother appeared. "I came in once, but I cut and run as soon as I saw how the land lay. Anybody killed or wounded?"

"Hush, dear," said Mrs. Hayes, earnestly, "don't speak of it here. Anna," she continued, to one of the rosy-faced maids, "I want you to take this little boy up to Master Andy's room, and put him to sleep in the spare bed. Be very kind to him, Anna," she added with a trembling lip, "for he has no mother, and the master has been frightening him terribly. But you must try and forget it, Fabian," she said, holding the child tight to her breast. "It will not always be so bad, you know. Your uncle has been put out to-day. Things will look brighter to morrow."

"Oh, will they?" interposed Master Andy, "nothing will ever be brighter as far as I can see till he's dead and underground. Jolly for us when he is."

"Hush, Andy, that's wrong. You've had no supper, Fabian. Anna shall take something to your bedroom. Only be careful the master don't see you, my good girl."

"Don't you fear, missus," replied Anna, determinately. She knew a trick worth two of the master catching her disobeying his orders.

"I am not hungry," said poor Fabian, in a mournful tone.

"You are tired, dear; you will feel better after a good night's rest. But I dare not stay longer. I have left poor little Milly all alone in the parlour;" and hastily kissing both the boys, she hurried back, with the spirit of a martyr, to receive the shower of abuse that she knew awaited her for her temporary absence.

"Where has that rascal of a priest hidden himself?" was the first inquiry that greeted her ears.

"He is gone, Henry. I let him out at the front door."

"How am I to be sure of that? You're as capable of telling a lie as he. I shouldn't wonder if he's skulking in a cupboard, or shut up with the women in the kitchen, or up to some other of his knavish Jesuitical tricks. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Telling Anna to put Fabian to bed. The poor boy is worn out with fright and fatigue."

"I'll frighten him before I've done with him, the young hound! I'll teach him to blubber every time I open my mouth! What's his age?"

"Eleven."

"Eleven! Puny little animal! He looks more like a girl than a boy with those absurd curls dangling down his back. Don't let me see him with them again, that's all, or I'll pull him all round the room by them. Have them off by to-morrow morning, and if he can't earn his salt any other way he'll do for a scare-crow to keep the birds off the turnips."

"Oh Henry! remember, we shall be paid for keeping Fabian; we can't treat him as if he were thrown upon our charity."

"I shall treat him just as I choose, madam, and you too, and your boy and girl, and every blessed member of the family. Hang it all! am I the master of this house, or am I not?"

Mrs. Hayes only took up her work again, and listened to his brutal speeches in silence.

Meanwhile the two boys, left together, were staring at one another in the kitchen.

"What are you in such a funk for?" demanded Andrew.

"A *foonk*?" repeated Fabian, "how do you then call that?"

He spoke so funnily that all the maids laughed, and Andy roared outright.

"Hush! hush! Master Andy," cried Anna, "or you'll have the master down upon us."

"Let him come," replied the boy defiantly. "He's so drunk he couldn't see a hole through a ladder. I shouldn't find much trouble in dodging him to-night. Come on, Fabian, have some bread and jam," proffering the dainty as he spoke. Poor Fabian, who had had no supper, and was half-sick with the emotion and fright he had gone through, drew nearer the table, and accepted the portion held out to him timidly.

"Don't be afraid of robbing me," said Andy. "There's lots more where that came from."

"From where did it come then, *mon cousin?*" demanded Fabian.

"The store-room, of course, you gaby. I stole three pots last week. I always steal the jam when mother leaves her keys about. Father's so stingy, Milly and I should never taste any if I didn't."

The bread and jam fell from Fabian's hand. "What!" he exclaimed, "You steal? You a thief?"

The idea was terrible to him. He had been listening to Andrew's bold and independent tone of voice with admiration—the admiration which the timid feel for the brave. But as the fact that his cousin had stooped to take what was not his own dawned upon Fabian's comprehension, the boys

changed places, and his was the strong mind that refused to be led captive by the weaker.

"I cannot eat your bread and jam, Andy," he said in a sorrowful voice, as he pushed it back again. Andrew coloured, but he was not going to give in.

"All right, you fool," he exclaimed politely, as he stuffed the forbidden sweets down his own throat and drummed with his feet against the legs of the wooden chair.

"Why won't you eat it, master?" demanded Anna.

"I cannot—not if it is stolen."

"Why, you young prig! Do you mean to preach to us? Because if so, the sooner you go back to wherever you came from the better."

"Preach! Oh no! I cannot preach—and I know nothing—no more than you—but *gentlemen*, they never steal!"

"And you're quite right, young master, as I've told Andy many and many a time. He'll get caught some day, and then there'll be a business and no mistake. But come now, I must take you up to your room, as the mistress told me, and by-and-bye you shall have some supper, as good as Andy's maybe, though it isn't stolen."

"You shut up!" cried Andy, indignant at her sarcasm.

Fabian lifted the violin-case, which with he had never parted company, in his arms, preparatory to carrying it upstairs.

"What's that?" demanded his cousin, curiously.

"It is my violin—what make music," said Fabian.

"Your violin—do you mean a fiddle? What a lark! Can you make music on it?"

"Ah! not like the lark, no; but my dear father used to say a little, moderately well."

"Take it out, and make us a little, moderately well, then," said Andy, mimicking Fabian's broken accent.

The child coloured sensitively.

"I speak so bad," he said in a low voice, "but the violin—she will speak for me."

"Law! he can't never do it—that boy," exclaimed the cook, admiringly.

"Shut the parlour door, Sarah, for mercy's sake, lest they hear it in the parlour."

"Fiddle away, Fabian!" cried Andy, who was wickedly anticipating in every sense what he would have termed "no end of a row!"

But with the first touch of the rosined bow upon the strings all ridicule ceased, and nothing but astonishment prevailed amongst the rustics. The

boy stood amongst them looking like a young Mozart, with his mourning cloak, and his ruddy falling locks, and earnest violet eyes. He did not play anything intricate, but the simple air was so tenderly rendered that it went to the hearts of all present, and when he had finished, with a long drawn-out chord that sounded like a sigh, there was silence for the space of several seconds, until Anna burst out crying, and said it brought her poor dead mother to her mind "so plain."

"Well, you *are* a swell at fiddling," were the first words in which Andy complimented his cousin's performance; "but, I say, can't you play a jig?"

"A *jeeg*? How do you call a *jeeg*?" demanded Fabian.

"A dance! Cutting capers—you know! Like this," said Andy, leaping into the air like a kangaroo.

"*Mais, oui—oui—sans doute,*" cried Fabian, catching his enthusiasm as he dashed into a medley of some of those merry Scotch airs that have found their way into the hearts of all nations. Andy was delighted; so were the maids, and before long a couple of them were jigging away in a corner of the kitchen as if they had nothing worse than fatigue to fear.

But in the midst of their mirth, a voice and a step, but too well-known to all, were heard ap-

proaching down the passage, and in the twinkling of an eye Fabian and his violin were whipped away, he scarcely knew how or by whom, until he found himself in company with Anna and Andrew, crouched in a pantry which was next the kitchen, and opened into it by means of a window high up in the wall.

"Hush! don't speak a word," whispered Anna, "for the window is open."

They all three huddled together, Fabian not half understanding the necessity of the move, until he heard his uncle's voice in the kitchen.

"Who was playing the fiddle here just now?" he asked angrily.

"No one, sir," replied the cook.

"It's a lie. Some man has been supping here to-night. Now, who was it? Did he come from the stable or the farm?"

"There haven't been no man here, I tell you," repeated the servant.

"Do you mean to tell me no one played the fiddle here?"

"No; we hain't got no men nor fiddles neither, and if you don't believe me, you'd better look for yourself, master," she replied sulkily.

The suggestion made Hayes glance around, when his eye fell on the violin-case, which Fabian in his

hurried and unexpected flight had left under a side-table.

"Why, what do you call *that*, you hussy?" he exclaimed, pouncing upon it.

"I don't know nothing about it, nor how it came here."

"Oh! you don't, don't you? Well! I shall just take it away with me then, until the owner comes to claim it. And when he does he'll get more than he bargained for, I can tell you. Be off to bed, the whole lot of you, and don't let me hear your voices again to-night. I shall look in again in ten minutes, and if the place isn't clear I'll turn you all out to-morrow, without any wages. Do you hear?"

"Well, I ain't deaf! of course I hear," returned the servant, insolently; but Farmer Hayes was used to receive insolence at the hands of his dependents. They were free to come and go as they chose. It was only the poor wretches who had no means of escape who were forced to put up with his ill-treatment. He stumbled back the way he came, with the violin-case in his hands, and as soon as he was fairly gone, Anna darted from her covert, dragging the boys after, and prepared to take them up to bed by the back staircase.

"Come on, children," she cried, "there's not a

moment to lose. He'll be back before we know where we are."

"But my case—the case for my poor violin! Shall I not have it again?" demanded Fabian, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, my pretty! That will be all right. I will fetch it out of his room when he leaves the house to-morrow. Only make haste now, and get out of his way."

She took Fabian and Andy upstairs to a room where they were to sleep together, and helped them to undress. The chamber, though poorly furnished, was comfortable enough; the beds were sweet and clean and well-provided with covering. Only Fabian could not drive from his memory the conversation he had overheard take place from the pantry window, and as he laid his head upon his pillow he said earnestly to Anna: "Why did the cook tell my uncle that no one had played the violin in the kitchen this evening, Anna?"

"Lor' bless me! What else would you have had her say? If she had told the master it was you, there wouldn't have been a whole bone left in your body by this time, I warrant."

"I should think not! Wouldn't he have kicked you?" said Andy.

"But there is no wrong in it!"

"Master don't wait for wrong. It's the wrong in himself he punishes others for."

"Still it was a lie, and I wish she had not told it for me."

"You must learn to tell 'em for yourself, youngster," said Andy, "or you won't be alive to tell anything at all this day month."

"True for you!" added Anna, as she took away the candle.

Poor Fabian, bereft, puzzled, and supperless, lay in the dark for some time after Andrew was fast asleep, wondering how he should live in a country where people stole and told lies, and excused themselves upon the score of necessity.

CHAPTER VII.

The Broken Violin.

WHEN Fabian awoke from the troubled sleep which his first night at Mordham brought him—he, who had been used to open his eyes beneath a sky which, if sometimes cold, was always brightly blue—he could not think where he was. A murky gray light was struggling through the panes of the uncurtained window sufficiently to make the white-washed walls and painted furniture of the room visible to his astonished gaze. Delacourt, without great means, had ever been most luxurious in his tastes, and he had lived in a country where the luxury of art was obtainable at a small cost. Poor Fabian, unfortunately for himself, had been reared like a little Sybarite, and thought no more of the possession of carved oak furniture, velvet cushions, and chased silver goblets than his cousins did of their rush-bottomed chairs and plates of crockery.

To him, therefore, the plain unfurnished bedroom looked like the cell of a prison, and he awakened to the consciousness of his position with a deep sigh. His beloved violin was placed on a chair by

the side of his bed. He took it up and held it to his breast in the gray dawn as though it had been a living thing, and drew the bow softly across the strings in plaintive chords that seemed to express the desolation of his spirit. As he did so, he heard a step traversing the passage outside; and, remembering the cautions of the night before, hid the instrument quickly beneath the bed-clothes. But he need not have been alarmed. It was only his aunt Emily, white and worn from the effects of the previous night, who, with a lighted candle in her hand, entered his room. She was attired for the day, and Fabian's first idea was that she had come to call him.

"Is it time to rise, *ma tante*?" he said springing up in bed.

"No, no, dear! lie down again. I have come to speak to you about something," she answered gently. She set down the candle-stick, and advancing to the bed, knelt beside it, and folded her arms about the boy.

"Did you sleep well, dear child?" she asked.

"Pretty well, *ma tante*. It is colder here than where I lived with my father, but perhaps I shall get used to it."

"Tell me all about your dear father," she said eagerly; "not aloud, Fabian, but in a whisper. I

loved him, dear, very, very much, though I was not able to tell him so. Did he ever speak of me to you? Can you remember your mother? Is it long since she died? Tell me everything!"

Then Fabian, with his arm round her wasted neck, told her, as well as he could, what has been already related here; how he had lived in those pretty rooms at Brusca, his father's sole companion for the last five years, and before that in Italy, where his mother had died; but that he had no remembrance of her, but only knew that dear parent who was both father and mother to him, and whom he so much loved and lamented.

As Fabian proceeded with his story, his aunt began to cry, and that made him cry too; so they mingled their tears together. But Mrs. Hayes declared that both the conversation and the weeping had done her good, and the boy was more contented after them in the prospect that lay before him. They had drawn him closer to his aunt, his father's only relation, and he felt, whatever disagreeables were in store for him, his place must be by her side. It was natural it should be so. But he could not think of his uncle without a shudder. When Mrs. Hayes rose to her feet again and dried her eyes, she drew a large pair of scissors from her pocket.

"Fabian, dear!" she said, in a deprecating tone of voice, "don't think me unkind, but I must cut your hair off."

"Cut off my hair!" echoed the boy; "Very good, *ma tante*; do so, if it pleases you."

"It does not please me at all, dear, but your uncle has a prejudice against your wearing curls. It is not the custom in this country for boys as old as you are. The other children would laugh at you and call you a girl."

Fabian reddened visibly. There was nothing girlish about him, except his appearance, and that had been preserved by his father more from a regard for art than a desire to keep him a child.

"Cut them all off, *ma tante*, quick!" he ejaculated. "If the English boys do not wear them so, neither will I. But it was not strange in Brusca."

"No, dear, of course not! Nor your dress either; but it is not like my Andy's you see. You will like me to alter your tunics into jackets, will you not, Fabian, and wear one of Andy's collars till yours are made smaller?"

She was alluding to the Vandyke collars, which almost covered the boy's shoulders.

"Yes, indeed I would," cried Fabian, with a dread of coming ridicule; "and cut my hair at

once, please, as close as ever you can. My father would not have liked to hear me called a girl."

Mrs. Hayes commenced to shear off the lovely chestnut locks with her scissors, but as they fell one by one upon the coverlet she sighed.

"It does seem a pity, but I'm sure it is best. Poor Charles, I wonder what he would think if he could see me cutting off the curls I am sure he must have been proud of!"

"Oh no, *ma tante*, he did not care for them. They would all have been shorn next year, had he lived. Pray throw them away, and never let me hear of them again, for now I am in England I wish to be as the English boys are."

"I shall not throw them away, my dear, I shall keep them in remembrance of your coming. And oh, Fabian, I hope you will be happy here. Only never thwart your uncle—never contradict him, and always do everything he tells you, and then I don't see how he can find it in his heart to be angry with you."

She kissed him two or three times tenderly, and then crept away, as gently as she had come, bearing the candle in her hand, and leaving the room once more enveloped in gloom.

"Hallo! What have you been doing to yourself—what a guy you look!" was Andrew's saluta-

tion to Fabian an hour later, when Anna, after many remonstrances and pushings and shakings, had stripped all the bed-clothes off the heir of the house of Hayes, as the only effectual means of making him rise and dress himself.

"You mean that my curls are gone," said Fabian.

"Yes! Who *done* it?" was Andy's grammatical rejoinder.

"Your good mother cut them off this morning. She said I must be made to look like an English boy."

"That's what she said—did she? Well, it's all the better, I daresay, for they would have been lovely things to pull you round the house by."

"You would not have pulled me by them, would you, Andy?"

"Don't know. If you cheeked me I might. But somebody else would, whether you had cheeked him or not."

"Do you mean my uncle?"

"Find out for yourself, youngster. And now you'd better be quick and tumble into your clothes, for if we're not in the parlour by the time father comes down to breakfast, he'll give us strap oil all round."

"Faugh! oil! It is not good to drink," replied innocent Fabian.

As it happened, however, Farmer Hayes was in one of his most amiable moods that morning, which was expressed by his never noticing anyone in the room, either upon entering or leaving it, by swallowing his breakfast in perfect silence, and walking off to his farm as soon as he had eaten as much as he required. This wonderful forbearance was due partly to a depressed condition of his temper, consequent on the excesses of the night before, and partly because there are times when the worst tempered get tired of creating a commotion. The excitement of it, like that of everything else, must occasionally pall. But so used were Farmer Hayes's family to regard every meal as the legitimate opportunity for a squabble, that silence on the "master's" part had come to be put down by them to good temper; and when, as on the present occasion, he quitted the house without leaving any orders behind him, they first drew a sigh of relief and then became hilarious. Andy wanted at once to drag Fabian through the thick snow that covered all outer things, to show him dogs, and rabbits, and horses, and all other joys of boyish hearts. But Mrs. Hayes, with more consideration for her nephew's delicate frame and unsuitable clothing, put her

gentle veto on the proposal, and although Fabian was most anxious to establish his character for manliness in Andrew's eyes, he felt grateful for his aunt's interposition, for he was suffering acutely with the cold and fatigue of his long journey. Whereupon Andy ran out to have a snow-balling match with the lads of the village, and Milly, who, although three years his junior, seemed to consider that as her cousin could not speak English fluently he must be a baby, made Fabian accompany her to her play-room, where she introduced him to half-a-dozen dolls and other fragmentary treasures, whilst he, too polite to deride her endeavours to amuse him (as an English-bred boy might have done), examined and admired, and shivered till he was half perished with the cold.

"Milly, Milly!" called out a stout young voice from the bottom of the stairs, "come down, I want to speak to you."

"There's Rosie," said Milly, as the sound reached her ears.

"And who is Rosie?"

"Mrs. Barnes's little girl from next door. Come down and see her, Cousin Fabian, for she is a great friend of ours, Rosie is."

Fabian, with no shyness about him, and only too glad to leave the fireless play-room, followed

Milly quickly to the lower regions, and there, waiting for them on the last step, stood a child, his first sight of whom he never afterwards forgot. A coarse countrified-looking little creature, perhaps, she would have appeared to the owners of those silky-haired, waxen-faced darlings that parade Hyde Park and its vicinity. For Rosie Barnes had run through the snow from her mother's house to that of the Hayes's, bareheaded and bareshouldered. Her chubby dimpled arms and hands were purple with the frosty air, and so were her stout legs, which, except for the worsted socks and clumsy boots, were bare. But her head was covered by a mass of tangled curls of the brightest auburn colour, which fell all over her laughing blue eyes—wide open, fearless, saucy eyes, that seemed as if their owner could be afraid of nothing and of no one; and her pouting red mouth displayed a row of pearly little teeth, newly cut, like milky filberts just taken from the shell. The child was a perfect Hebe, and might have been painted for a youthful Bacchus, or a Puck, or an incarnation of mirth itself, with her brilliant colouring and her wilful mischievous look.

"Come on," she exclaimed lustily, as she caught sight of the cousins. "What are you such a time for? I want to see the new boy. I've come over on purpose."

To the "new boy" this creature was a revelation (as the London fog had been). The little girls he had associated with in Brusca were few and far between. Foreign children are not allowed to mix so freely as ours after infancy has passed, and those he had seen were prim, dressed up, precocious little women. His cousin Milly he had begun to consider rather a nice little girl, but she was of a melancholy temperament, somewhat like his own, and everyone knows the force of contrast. Fabian was beyond his years; Rosie Barnes almost beneath hers, which already numbered ten. He was accomplished; she knew nothing. He was sensitive and refined to a degree; she was a mere animal, admirable for her beauty and her boldness, but nothing more. On only one point did these two children assimilate. They were both wanting in shyness, she by nature, he on account of having been so much brought forward by his father. But, from that day, Fabian made Rosie his companion and his friend, to the exclusion of his cousin Milly, who possessed a disposition so much more like his own. We may argue as we will, but there is no accounting for these apparent contradictions, even in older persons than my little heroes and heroines. It was well said by Miss Rosie's admirers that she had no unnecessary timidity; for the first thing she did on Fabian reach-

ing the last stair was to seize hold of and twist him round.

"Where are his curls?" she exclaimed shrilly.

"Mother cut them off," replied Milly.

"What a shame! I was longing to pull them. How I would have 'guyed' a boy with long hair. Well," to Fabian, "aren't you going to speak to me? What's your name?"

Fabian bowed—like a little prig as he was, poor child!—and answered the question.

"Oh my!" cried the beauty. "Look at him bowing. My patience! I suppose we shall have all to do it now;" and, stepping apart, she began a series of ducks and bobs in supposed imitation of the stranger's salutation to herself.

Fabian laughed. He was a sweet-tempered child, and seldom took offence.

"*C'est ça, mademoiselle!*" he said, forgetting himself.

"La! Hear him talk. I shall split with laughing. Say it over again, that's a good boy. You're the funniest fellow I've ever seen in my life."

"No—no; I can speak the English!" remonstrated Fabian.

"And he can play—oh, so beautifully, Rosie—on the fiddle," interpolated Milly.

"On the fiddle! What a lark! Oh, fetch his

fiddle, and make him do it. Will you? will you? will you?" she continued, thrusting her rosy face into Fabian's.

"I will do anything you wish, mademoiselle," replied the boy, who was charmed at every opportunity afforded of practising his beloved art.

Rosie screamed with delight, and leapt about the passage like a wild thing whilst Fabian went to fetch his Cremona.

But when the children reassembled in the kitchen, and he began to play, she became quite subdued, and crept up to "the new boy's" side, and gazed in his face whilst she watched the manipulation of the instrument. There was a pathos and sentiment about Fabian's music, simple as it was, that could not fail in some measure to convey to his listeners the feeling with which it imbued himself; though their surprise at his being able to play the violin was quite as much a matter of astonishment to him.

"It's a perfect marvel how he can do it," said the cook, who had stopped her work to listen to him; "and such a child too. It beats one altogether."

"It's lovely, ain't it?" cried Miss Rosie.

"How, then," said Fabian, not displeased at the general flattery; "does no one play the violin in this country?"

"Oh yes! Old Joey Bunn plays the fiddle for us to dance at the harvest-homes, but not a bit like you."

"But at the theatres and the opera-houses, who plays there? In the orchestra, I mean?"

The children stared at him and laughed.

"Is that French?" said Rosie.

"I do not understand you, mademoiselle."

"Opera-houses, and or—or—what-d'ye-call-'ems. What are they?"

"Are there none here, then? No public gardens, nor concert-halls, nor promenades?"

"Isn't he a cure?" said Rosie, nudging Milly in the side.

"La, child!" exclaimed the cook, "we don't understand such lingo in these parts. There are no houses in Mordham but the farms and the chapel, and no gardens but such as the gentry keep for their own flowers."

"What a strange country!" sighed Fabian. "What do you do, then, to amuse yourselves?"

"Oh, in the summer we go hay-making and harvesting, and nutting and black-berrying, and in the winter we make slides and snow-balls. I'd jolly well like to shove you down a slide," said Rosie, as a wind-up. "I nearly caught the French gentleman this morning. He slipped half-way down, and I

was in hopes he was gone, but he picked himself up again. *I was so sorry!*"

"What French gentleman?" demanded Fabian, quickly, whose thoughts had been with Père Raoul ever since the night before.

"The one that came to mother and said Mrs. Hayes had sent him. He's your friend, isn't he? He wanted a bed, and mother gave him one, and oh my!" said Rosie, suddenly remembering herself, "that's the very reason I was sent over here, to tell Mrs. Hayes about him, and I quite forgot it."

"Your mother gave Père Raoul a bed last night. Oh, I am grateful!—I kiss her hands—it was too good of her," exclaimed Fabian. "My poor Père! I lay awake half the night thinking of him. How glad I am he was safe and warm! And is he gone again, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, he went this morning. My father drove him to Blackeney in the tax-cart."

"Ah! what can I do to show my gratitude to your good parents, Miss Rosie?"

"Play for me. It all comes to the same thing."

"I will play for you every day, Rosie, for your goodness to my poor Père."

He had not quite comprehended the episode of the slide. He lifted up the instrument and recommenced to play, and the little girls and the servants

were so attentively listening to his performance that none of them knew that Mr. Hayes was near at hand, until he threw open the outer door and stood in their midst. The maids immediately shrank away to their several occupations. Milly crouched beside the table, shivering, but Rosie Barnes faced the farmer, bold as brass, and Fabian, who was unaware of having done any wrong, was as little afraid as she. But Hayes' eye caught sight of the violin, and connected it at once with the empty case of which he had taken possession the night before.

"Where did you get that fiddle?" he inquired roughly of the boy.

"It is mine, monsieur."

"Don't 'moosy' me, you young frog, call me by my proper name."

"It is my violin, uncle."

"Don't believe it—where should a child like you get a fiddle? It belongs to the man who was fiddling here last night. Now—no lies; where did you find it?"

"I never lie," said Fabian, proudly. "It was my father's instrument, and now it is mine."

"Oh, you're cheeky, are you? Going to turn out as impertinent a fool as your father. Perhaps it was you, then, that played the fiddle in my kitchen last night, eh, sir?"

"It was!"

"Oh! it was—was it? And asked the servants to tell falsehoods afterwards in order to avoid my anger? And yet you never lie—do you? you hypocritical, foreign-bred young dog."

"How can a frog be a dog?" demanded Rosie Barnes, saucily. She hated Farmer Hayes, and never lost an opportunity of annoying him, to the terror of his wife and his children.

"Hold your tongue, you jade; I didn't speak to you," said the farmer, angrily.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" rang out in the child's shrill treble. The mocking rejoinder was too much for him. He sprang forward, and would have boxed Rosie's ears had not the slight figure of Fabian interposed itself between them.

"What do you do that for?" exclaimed Hayes, his wrath diverted in the direction of the boy.

"You may call me what you like, uncle, though I have done nothing to deserve the names you give me, but you shan't strike Mees Rosie."

"*Shan't!*" The word was almost a new one to Farmer Hayes. No one in that house, from the highest to the lowest, had ever dared to use it to him before. It put him in a frenzy.

"*Shan't*, you young beggar, how dare you speak

in that way to me? You will soon see whether I shall or shan't. Stand out of the way."

"*I will not*," replied Fabian, firmly, though his frame shook with excitement.

"*You will not?* You will not do as I order you? Then take that, you young hound!" cried Hayes, as he dealt the boy a violent blow on the head, "and take that—and that——" he repeated, as he seized the violin from his grasp, and dashed it forcibly against the table. "I'll teach you to fiddle in my kitchen, and tell lies and defy me to my face, you wretched painter's brat!" and so saying he strode out into the yard again, scowling at Rosie, who had lost all disposition to laugh, as he went.

Fabian had never been struck in his life before. The blow was hard to bear, both for mind and body, but it was nothing compared to the other calamity. His cherished violin, the Cremona for which Charles Delacourt had paid a fabulous price, lay, split into four or five fragments, on the ground.

The boy gazed at it, too much stunned at first by the blow and the shock to do more than gaze. But when Rosie put her chubby arms about him, and begged him not to cry, and the servants with one accord declared it was "a burning shame to

break the child's music," and Milly stroked his face with her little hand in her attempt at comfort, the full sense of his loss dawned on the boy, and casting himself upon the ground, beside the broken instrument, he sobbed bitterly. He knew what it portended. There was to be no more music in his life from that day forward. When his grief had somewhat spent itself, he gathered up the fragments of the Cremona, and without a word of explanation to anyone, carried them up to his bedroom in silence. But, as he went, he felt as though his heart, like the violin, were broken.

CHAPTER VIII.

Fabian's Vow.

As may be well supposed, this incident, added to the insulting reception which Père Raoul had received from the farmer's hands, did not tend to promote any feelings of respect for his uncle in Fabian's breast. Indeed, from that moment he learned to look upon him as his greatest enemy. The boy's attitude and tone of defiance also were not lost upon nor forgotten by Hayes. In them he seemed to trace tokens of the spirit which had created so many quarrels between himself and his wife's brother in years gone by, and he never thereafter disassociated the father from the son. He could recall the temerity with which Delacourt used to dispute his opinions, overturn his theories, and ridicule his belief; how he used to hate his brother-in-law for the ease with which he would confute his arguments, and the insolence with which he would condemn his taste. He used to be intensely jealous of the handsome young artist in those days, and long to be revenged upon him; and now that it was in his power to pay off the old score, Fabian

should suffer for his father's fault. Charles Delacourt, careless, indolent, and pleasure-seeking, had almost forgotten — or, more probably, had never known—the extent of Henry Hayes's grudge against him, else he had never left his child to his care. He remembered that they had not pulled well together when he was in England—nothing more! But the farmer's brutal nature was not one to rub out an old grievance readily, and all his former animosity had revived at the sight of Delacourt's son. Mrs. Hayes, in the hope it might prove some sort of protection for her nephew, had given it out largely that the boy had money of his own. Therefore her husband did not quite like to put him to any menial labour (as he often did Andrew), for fear the neighbours might tax him with neglect. But he made his home life as miserable to him as he possibly could—finding fault with and punishing him on every occasion—until Fabian's spirit was so broken that, in the first year of his bondage, he would often throw himself upon the ground in a paroxysm of despair, and pray God to take him out of a world where he was so miserable.

But there was no means of escape for him, and the inevitable is soonest succumbed to. When Fabian found that he was not allowed to write a letter to Père Raoul, nor any friend in Brusca, that

music and painting were forbidden as though they had been wrong, and the luxuries he had been used to he should never enjoy again, he learned little by little, and with many tears, to give up hope and the remembrance of past pleasure, and to make the most of what remained to him. Youth is so buoyant and easily amused, and the boy possessed so much intelligence and sense of humour, that before long his laugh (except when in his uncle's presence) rang out as cheerily as Andrew's, and for as slight cause. The two boys went to a small day-school in the neighbourhood, where they met with creatures of their own age and sex; and, as Père Raoul had prophesied, before six months were over his head Fabian had almost forgotten French and German, and spoke English with a broad Norfolk accent. He had dropped many of his prim old-fashioned ways also, and could be as boisterous as anyone, even Rosie Barnes herself. Little by little, just as his velvet tunics and trousers changed their shape and became Anglicised under the influence of Mrs. Hayes's needle, so did Fabian lose his foreign appearance and look like an English lad; but always with something about him which raised him above his fellows, always with the same delicately-cut features, though often dirty with outdoor play, the same earnest violet eyes, and ruddy

hair curling in short locks close to his head. Strangers often stopped when they passed him playing in the road or fields, to ask who he was. The early training he had received seemed to have been lost; but it was only dormant. The spirit would wake again so soon as it found itself in a congenial atmosphere, and the past would return fresh as though it happened yesterday.

Meanwhile the years which brought such changes to Fabian simply developed Andrew's character. At fifteen he was the same lad he had been at eleven, only bigger, bolder, and perhaps less cunning, because less fearful of consequences. He oftener defied his father to his face than he had been used to do, still oftener disobeyed him in secret. Yet—strange though it may appear—Fabian, like his aunt Emily, had a deep and lasting attachment for his cousin Andrew. He saw his faults—no one better—and he despised them. He thought it mean and dastardly in Andy to steal the food which his father denied him, and base to lie in order to conceal the fault. But when he saw his cousin stop on his way to school, to give half the apples and biscuits with which his pockets were filled to a child that had fallen down and hurt himself, Fabian could not help admiring, whilst he condemned, the false generosity. And again, when his uncle had detected him in the

act of trying to dissuade Andy from robbing the hens' nest, and, mistaking the culprit, had thrashed Fabian for his supposed peculations—though Andrew had not delivered himself over to justice, because, as he naïvely remarked, “his being flogged also would not have made Fabian's back a whit less sore”—yet how grateful he had been to his cousin for not betraying him, and how often he had reminded him of his obligation, and called him a hero and a brick for standing by a friend in the time of need. And to Fabian, whose tender heart was ready to respond to any token of affection, such acknowledgments were ample payment for anything he might undergo in his attempts to shield Andy from punishment. But somebody else knew of young Delacourt's goodness to her wayward son, and was deeply grateful to him for it; and this was Mrs. Hayes. The years which want of space compels us to skim over so lightly had been portentous ones to her, drawing her soul, as they had, close to the very gates of death. And as she saw the day coming nearer and nearer, when she must quit the children for whom she had been able to do so little in this world, she rested her confidence not in her own son and daughter, but in her brother's child. Fabian had seen much happen during those years, which no after circumstances could blot from his mind.

He had seen his poor aunt brow-beaten and cowed by her brutal husband, until she had hardly dared to raise her voice to refute the accusations he brought against her. He had even been witness to more than one fearful scene, when the unhappy woman had been struck before her own servants and children, humiliated past bearing in the presence of those who owed her deference. His boyish heart had swollen with indignation at such times, and his boyish hand had attempted to defend her, at the risk of being felled to the ground himself. Milly was always too frightened to do anything but cry when her father was drunk or angry, and Andrew's selfish and somewhat callous nature was too apt to induce him to keep out of the dissension altogether, by quitting the room. It was Fabian, on whom Mrs. Hayes had the least claim, who alone had been brave enough to try and interfere on her behalf (as he had done between the farmer and little Rosie on the first day of their acquaintance), and to cry "Shame" on his uncle for the cowardly treatment to which he subjected his wife. Often and often had Fabian directed Farmer Hayes's anger from his aunt Emily to himself; and it was whilst striving to atone for the wrongs he had thus suffered that Mrs. Hayes made a friend of her brother's son, and opened all her heart to him.

"I shall not be here long, dear Fabian," she said one day, as she was bathing a great blue bruise on his temple with vinegar and water; "I have been ill for many years, and I feel my strength failing me every day. You will not cry for me, dear, will you? You know it will be a mercy when I am released."

"We shall all miss you terribly, dear aunt," replied the boy, kissing her, "Andy, and Milly, and I. What shall we do when you leave us alone? There will not be a smile nor a kind word for any one of us."

"Poor children," sighed Mrs. Hayes, "if I could only be of any use to you! But I am powerless even to save you from a blow. You will get on better without me than with me. At least, so I hope and believe."

"If *you* are happier, that is what we must think of," replied Fabian. "But do not say you have been of no use to us. What should I have done on first coming here without you—poor unhappy orphan that I was? I believe uncle would have killed me had you not been my friend. How often have you hid me away from his anger, or taken the blame of what I have done on yourself, or bathed and bound up the effects of his violence, as you are doing now!"

"A blow which you took instead of me, my child. It is I who am the debtor, Fabian."

"No, no, dear aunt! a thousand times no! If I have ever been happy enough to save you from a little of his brutality, it is not half what I ought to have done. My dear father said you would be like a second mother to me, and you have. You have been all the mother I have ever known, and I love you as much as Andy or Milly can do!"

"My darling Fabian! If this is really the case, and you feel for me like this, make me a promise before I die."

"I will promise you anything in the world, dear aunt."

"Be a brother to my Andy. He will want a friend so much. Fabian! I cannot tell you why or wherefore, but since I have known that my days are numbered, I have had a dark and dreadful presentiment about my boy. God grant it may not be true! but it haunts me night and day."

"A presentiment, aunt, of danger to Andrew! Indeed it must be fancy."

"Oh, I hope and pray it is so. But I cannot shake it off my mind. You know what your uncle's temper is, Fabian, and how he and Andy hate each other. It is an awful word to use between father and son, but it is the truth. And what I seem to

dread is, that when I have gone quarrels will arise between them, and they will separate."

"Will it not be the best thing for Andrew? How could he live on here all his life, subject to my uncle's treatment? It is bad enough now we are boys. What will it be when we are men?"

"Fabian, you know that as soon as you become of age you will be independent of your uncle?"

"Yes, aunt, I know it; and as soon as ever I am twenty-one, I mean to leave Mordham and go back to Brusca to see my dear old friend, Père Raoul. I think it is that hope on which I live."

Mrs. Hayes covered her face with her hands and uttered a low cry of pain.

"What is it? What have I said to grieve you?" asked Fabian.

"Nothing, dear boy. It is quite right you should go away, and I am happy to think you have such a means of escape. But what will become of my poor children, left in his clutches?"

Fabian started.

"But Andrew will be a man also by that time, aunt, and able to do as he chooses."

"How can he choose, poor boy? He is entirely dependent on his father! If he does not continue to work on the farm, Mr. Hayes will turn him out

to starve. And you know his spirit—how he defies and contradicts him; I have no hope that they will ever agree when Andrew is beyond compulsion.”

Fabian’s thoughtful eyes were cast down for a few moments, then he said:

“Dear aunt, do not be unhappy! I will always be Andy’s friend and brother! If he quarrels with uncle, he shall come with me, and we will share my money together. He shall not starve whilst I have bread—rest assured of that.”

“Oh Fabian! do you mean what you say? You are very young yet, remember—only fifteen—and you do not know the temptations that will assail you, and make it hard to keep your promise. When you are a man you may wish to marry or to settle in business, and you will not think of my poor Andrew. Yet, if it *could* be——”

“If what could be, dear aunt?”

“That you were in earnest—that you understood what it is you promise me—I should die in peace.”

Fabian raised himself—he had been lying with his poor bruised and throbbing temple on a sofa—and looked Mrs. Hayes steadfastly in the face. How white and wan she seemed! He could have counted the veins in her forehead; and her sunken eyes and

cheeks gave her an appearance that was almost ghastly. Tears started in his own eyes at the sight.

"Aunt Emily, I know that I am only a boy in years, but I have the memory of a man. My father loved you—oh, so dearly—and you loved him in return. Is that not sufficient? If my promise to be Andy's brother when you are gone, not in name only but in deed, would be of so much comfort to you, I will give you more—I will swear, as I hope to meet my own mother in heaven, that, should he need it, I will share everything I possess down to the last farthing with my cousin Andrew."

"Oh my dear good boy!" sobbed Mrs. Hayes. "And my dear Milly—you will be her friend also, will you not, Fabian?"

"I will always be their friend to the last day of my life," replied Fabian, solemnly. Then, after a pause, he added: "You know what I so much want to be, aunt—a doctor. Is it true that when I am sixteen I am to be allowed to choose a profession for myself?"

"It is quite true, my dear. I have seen the copy of your father's will, which that good priest sent us from Brusca. The interest of your money, which is about two hundred pounds a year, is to be paid to your uncle, or anyone who provides you with education and a home, until you are twenty-

one; but at sixteen you may decide what calling you will follow, and the expenses of your training for it are to come out of your income."

"Then, if in another year I choose to be a doctor, uncle can't refuse me?"

"No; he has no power to refuse, but he will try and persuade you to remain here, because the expense of your going to London and walking the hospitals will swallow up all the interest of your money."

"But I would not be a farmer for all the world—I hate it! I must be an artist or a doctor, and Mr. Barnes says artists are of no account in this country."

"I think they are considered rather a poor sort of folk in England, dear," replied Mrs. Hayes, sighing. "I remember, when our Charles first took to painting, the farmers about thought he had fallen very low. And it's difficult to make money that way, either."

"I would rather do good than make money, aunt," said Fabian, with a flash of the old ambition that had been so sadly crushed since his arrival in England, "and the profession of medicine seems such a glorious one to me. If I knew something of it now, for instance, I might do you some good, my poor dear aunt, instead of

being only able to pity you for having that dreadful cough, and being so white, and thin, and weak. I only wish I could," he added, affectionately.

"Fabian," cried Mrs. Hayes, hysterically, "don't wish that! The cruellest thing that anybody could do would be to try and keep me in this miserable world. Oh, let me go, dear boy, let me go! I shall have no rest or peace till I get to heaven."

At this moment, whilst his mother was sobbing at Fabian's side, the door burst open to admit Andy.

"Holloa, mother!" he cried, as he saw her condition. "What's the row now? Has that brute been worrying you again? I cut and run when I saw him getting up the steam after dinner, for fear I should make matters worse instead of better. Did he hit you, Fabian? I see you've got a jolly good knock on your forehead."

"He threw the stool at me, Andy!"

"Pig!" interpolated his cousin.

"Because the dear boy tried to save me," said Mrs. Hayes. "Oh my son—my own darling son! What will you all do when I am gone?"

"Gone! where?"

"To the grave, my child. Can't you see that I'm dying, Andy?"

The announcement was too sudden. Andrew gazed in his mother's face for a moment to make sure her words were true, and then, flinging himself with far too much force for her enfeebled frame into her arms, he burst into a violent flood of tears.

"Don't, mother—don't, mother!" he sobbed, "for I can't bear it. I can't indeed."

Mrs. Hayes mingled her tears with his.

"My Andy," she whispered tenderly, as she embraced the great rough boy with all the strength of which she was capable—"my own son—my darling child! I have loved you, Andy, better than anything else in the world, but I must leave you—I must leave you."

"Mother, dear mother!" sobbed Andy.

"It won't be long now, Andy. I'm breaking up day by day. But try and be good when I'm gone, darling. Try and be friends with your father. He is your father, my boy, for all his faults, and you owe him obedience, and respect, and duty."

"He has killed you," said the lad, bitterly.

"No, dearest; say rather, God is mercifully taking me home."

"And I shall have no friends left. There will be no one to love me when you are gone."

"Yes, darling, God has left you a friend. He sent you a brother when He sent Fabian here."

"What! *this* chap?" cried Andy, contemptuously.

"He's no older than I am, and not half so strong!"

"But he has a brave and generous heart, and he has promised me, so long as he lives, to stand by you in all things. That promise has made me happier than anything else, Andy. Let me hear you say the same, my darling, that you will always be Fabian's brother and friend."

The boy stood up and regarded his cousin gravely, as if to ask if this were serious. Fabian held out his hand, and Andrew grasped it.

"We've always been chums, old fellow, haven't we? Though we've fought, too, when we had a mind to. But I never bore you any malice, you know that, Fabian."

"Yes, Andrew, I do; we've stood by each other in a scrape before this, and we'll continue to do so still. Dear aunt! do be happy on that account. Andy and I will never desert each other."

"And Milly — my poor timid, delicate Milly," said Mrs. Hayes, faintly; "you will not forget her, either of you? You will be her champions and defenders?"

"If father strikes her, I'll kill him," said Andrew, emphatically.

"My brave, dear boys——" commenced his mother; but she never finished the sentence, for in another moment she had sunk into a swoon upon the floor. Fabian and Andy sprang to her aid, and lifted her between them on to the sofa. But when the servants had been summoned to attend her, she was found to be so ill that she had to be carried to her bed, which she never left again.

In a week's time from the conversation she had held with her nephew, Mrs. Hayes's spirit was released from all its troubles, and even the farmer forgot to bully the household, in the general consternation that fell upon it with the intelligence that its gentle and long-suffering mistress had quitted them for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

Rosie Barnes.

SUCH was the training by which my two heroes were prepared to encounter the temptations of the world on which they must so soon enter.

Three years have elapsed since Mrs. Hayes' death before we meet them again. Those years had not brought many material changes to the residents of Mordham Farm. The shock of his wife's death, which at first had somewhat subdued the farmer's spirit, had not lasted long. Nothing would cure his abominable temper, and since no one could stand it who was not absolutely obliged to do so, he was compelled to find vent for it inside his own domains. The establishment, generally, had little thought how much it owed to poor Mrs. Hayes' meek and long-suffering disposition, until she was no longer able to interpose herself as a butt to divert her husband's wrath from the rest of the family. None took their faults upon their own shoulders now she was gone, and they had to bear the brunt of their shortcomings as best they might. In consequence, scarcely a servant could be found to remain in Farmer Hayes'

service, and poor little Milly had often to do the greater part of the housework with her own hands. Still, with Mrs. Hayes the chief victim of her husband's brutality was removed, and though he continued to thrash the boys and to scold his daughter, his ill-temper had not half the effect it used to have, and he substituted a vast amount of silence and surliness for his former violent displays of passion. Andrew, who was supposed to be learning farming under his father, he usually spoke to as if he had been a dog, and the lad answered in much the same fashion. People said there was no love lost between them, and that the son would be just such another as the father by-and-by; but they were wrong. Andy had elements of both good and evil in him that Henry Hayes had never possessed, but he hated his parent, and saw no reason why he should give him more than he received. His one thought was how he should manage some day to make sufficient money to leave the farm, and Mordham, and everything connected with his present existence, and make a new life for himself in a new country. He envied Fabian his prospect of future deliverance above everything in the world, and never ceased wondering why, since he had the option of going, he had not already gone. For Fabian Delacourt was eighteen years old, and still remained at Mordham; and, what

appeared stranger still to those who were not in the secret, his uncle treated him far better than he did his own children.

This effect had been produced by an interview held between Fabian and himself about a year after Mrs. Hayes's death, during which the boy had intimated that he knew the contents of his father's will, and intended to act upon them. The farmer at first had attempted to coerce Fabian by his usual bluster, but the lad had remained firm, and ended by informing his uncle that he was in correspondence with Père Raoul, and had ascertained through him that the will itself was with an *avocat* in Brusca, and M. Fevrier, his father's old friend, had been appointed joint trustee with Mr. Hayes, and would see Charles Delacourt's wishes respecting his son carried out, should they meet with any opposition from himself. The boy's coolness and knowledge of his rights had perfectly astounded the farmer, and for the first time in his life he found it expedient to draw in his horns. The truth was that the harvest had been very bad that year, and everything in the shape of provisions was at famine prices, and it would have been exceedingly inconvenient for him to give up the two hundred pounds which had annually found its way, with hardly any diminution, into his pocket, ever since Fabian had come to Mordham. So he

thought it best to temporise, the end of which was that he worked so upon Fabian's tender feelings that the boy agreed not to be in a hurry to choose a profession, but to wait and look about him a little. His consent to remain at Mordham was gained the more easily by the wily farmer insinuating that he might do better after all by following his father's art, and recommending him to procure a stock of brushes, colours, and canvases from the country town, and see if he had preserved any taste for painting. This pleasure, which had hitherto been strictly denied him, was a great incentive to patience on Fabian's part. He turned his attic bedroom into a studio, and worked away at his canvases day after day, while Milly, and the animals, and the servants—and sometimes laughing Rosie Barnes, now developed into a buxom maiden of seventeen—stood by turns as his models. So Fabian had permitted two years to slip quietly away, and made no effort to take up the study of medicine, to which he had once, in prospect, devoted his life. His uncle was less rude to him than to anyone else in the house, being anxious to keep him contented at Mordham, and he pursued his own way pretty much as inclination prompted him to do.

But was it only the pursuit of his father's art that made Fabian Delacourt consent to waste some

of the best working years of his life at Mordham? The answer is a doubtful one.

* * * *

It was at the close of a glorious day in June, and for once peace and content seemed to reign in the old farmhouse at Mordham. Its inmates had been holding high holiday for a week past, for it was the time of the cattle-show at Norwich, and Farmer Hayes, whose money affairs were at a very low ebb, had thought to retrieve matters by a little speculation, and was consequently staying with a friend in that city till he had completed his bargains and seen the show right through; so that there was no fear of his baneful presence breaking in at any moment to mar their innocent mirth, and Emily Hayes (now a tall, slender girl of sixteen) was actually singing as she tripped backwards and forwards from the parlour to the kitchen, carrying in dishes of cake and fruit wherewith to spread the table for tea. She was not exactly pretty—that is to say, one had to look into her face for some time before one recognised its charm, but once discovered, it was very lasting. Her pale complexion and generally serious look detracted from the beauty of her dark eyes and pensive mouth; but though she spoke but seldom, and then in a low voice (a trick inherited from the state of terror in which the poor

child had been reared), she was a sensible and clear-headed girl, with a warm, loving heart, and a perfectly open nature. She was attired very simply in a purple cotton dress, made with a skirt to clear her ankles, and a black stuff apron; but she looked a lady for all that, with her slender feet and hands, and her small well-shaped head, round which her cousin Fabian had induced her to bind her dark brown hair like the classical ladies of old. When Milly had laid the table and prepared the tea in the old-fashioned metal teapot, there was nothing more to do but to wait for the advent of her brother and cousin.

"Now, where can those boys be?" she said to herself after a moment, and then, struck by a sudden thought, she ran to the foot of the staircase and called out, "Fabian!"

"All right," replied a voice somewhere from the upper storey, "I'm coming."

"Tea's ready; make haste," she reiterated.

"Can't you give a fellow time to put on his coat and waistcoat?" said Fabian, good-temperedly, as he appeared upon the landing.

"I had no idea you were there till you answered me. Fancy being boxed up in that painting-room from ten till six. What *are* you doing?"

"Painting, of course—what else?"

"Haven't you been out to-day?"

"Not since the early morning. I walked to Blakeney and back before breakfast. Where's Andy?"

"I don't know. He went out to the hay-fields after dinner, but he ought to have been home an hour ago. You're two nice sociable boys, you are! One stops up in his painting-room all day, and the other walks out of the house without a word, whilst I have to lay the tea-table and wait till you shall be pleased to return."

"Men must work and women must weep!" cried Fabian, gaily, as he put his arm round Milly's waist. But the girl did not seem to like the harmless familiarity. She drew herself away from contact with her cousin, and coloured vividly. It could hardly have been from dislike of him, for Fabian Delacourt had developed into a very handsome youth. He had always been a pretty boy; yet pretty boys often turn into ordinary-looking men. Fabian had not. The rich ruddy hue was still upon his close-cut wavy hair, and a small moustache of a lighter shade covered his upper lip. His eyebrows and lashes had darkened till they seemed to cast a shadow upon his violet eyes, and lend them a purple bloom like that which lay upon the sun-ripened grapes of his native land of Italy. Indeed, Fabian had a certain foreign air and look about

him—inherited, doubtless, from his mother, but also due in part to his early associations—that always made him appear a stranger amongst the unrefined and rustic population of Mordham. He seemed to have grown merry enough, however, as, laughing at Milly's endeavours to escape him, he seized her by force, and waltzed with her round the tea-table before he flung himself into a chair and commenced to attack the meal before him; and few would have recognised in the happy, careless-looking youth, the pale, pensive, and precocious child that Père Raoul had brought to Mordham seven years before. The rough, hard life and out-door exercise had made a man of him—even his uncle's harshness may, in a great measure, have contributed to bring about an end which his father's careless indulgence would never have effected. So true is it that the lives that are chosen for us are far better than any we could choose for ourselves.

"Andy still out in the hay-field?" inquired Fabian, with his mouth full of bread and fruit.

"I suppose so, Fabian. He had his beer sent to the three-acre piece at four o'clock. But I'm rather glad he has not come home."

"Why so?"

"It will be an excuse to go and join him after tea. You will come with me, won't you? It will be

so delightful! Nothing smells sweeter than a hay-field when the sun has set."

Fabian looked down—and a little bit conscious. "I can't go this evening, Milly."

"Surely you're never going back to that painting-room of yours again after tea! You'll make yourself ill with the smell of paint if you sit over it all day. You will indeed, Fabian."

"Nonsense! What, with both the windows open!" cried the boy, cheerily. "Why, Milly, real painters, like M. Fevrier, work in their studios morning, noon, and night, for years together, and are none the worse for it."

"But they do it for their bread. It is not choice with them, but necessity. But you, Fabian, are only studying. There is no need you should deny yourself air and exercise for the sake of it."

"I am not going to deny myself either," replied her cousin, uneasily. "But I cannot go to the field to-night, Milly, so don't ask me."

The girl played with her strawberries and looked disappointed.

"Perhaps Rosie will be there," she remarked after a pause, and glancing up to note the effect of her words. Fabian coloured furiously, but answered with affected *nonchalance*: "Perhaps so — what if she is?"

"I thought you might like it better if we had company, Fabian."

"No, Milly; if I had wished to go I would have gone with you. *Au revoir*, my little cousin!" and leaving the table, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered up to his painting-room with as careless an air as he could assume.

There were several canvases in various stages of completion scattered about the chamber, but the one upon the easel was that which occupied his present attention. It represented a milkmaid walking home through the standing corn with her pail balanced upon her head; but in the auburn tresses, wide-open blue eyes, and milk-white throat and arms, it was easy enough to recognise that the model who had sat for it was no other than his old companion, Rosie Barnes.

There she smiled from the canvas, a thousand times more saucy and piquant-looking than of old, with all the added strength upon her of a woman's conscious beauty.

Fabian looked at the picture, took up his brush and mahl-stick, put an extra touch of carmine on the lips, and deepened the blue shade of the whites of the eyes, then flung down his implements with a sigh.

"The more I work at it, the less it becomes like

her," he thought. "I may as well throw it on one side at once. I shall never do her justice, never!"

He sat down, and taking up a book, attempted to read, but his restlessness appeared too great to render any occupation feasible. He might just as well have accompanied Milly to the hay-field, only he appeared to be waiting for something which rendered him unable to sit still in the same place for ten minutes together. The "something" came at last. Seven strokes sounded from the church clock, and before it had ceased striking, Fabian was creeping down the back staircase on his way to the nut-walk—a covered-in pathway on his uncle's ground, which ran alongside of a paddock communicating with Mr. Barnes's farm.

"And Milly thought Rosie would be in the hay-field. Poor Milly," mused Fabian, with the pity which all lovers feel for those less happy than themselves. Miss Rosie was not in the nut-walk when he reached it, but before long she came. She was certainly very pretty, with that richly-coloured, glowing beauty that appeals so powerfully to the senses, and she was as thorough a coquette as a limited country practice had afforded her the opportunity to become. But of that Fabian, of course, knew nothing. She was the fairest specimen of youthful womanhood that Mordham or its environs had

afforded him, and he loved her with the passionate energy of an untried heart. Indeed, he was ready at that moment to give up all hope of future success in either the Beautiful or the Good, for the sake of living out the dream of Elysian happiness which love for this rustic Venus had raised in his romantic and imaginative brain. And as they paced together up and down the nut-walk that evening, he told her so.

“But la, Fabian!” she exclaimed—Miss Rosie was not much more refined in speech or manner than she had been on the day when she made a slide for Père Raoul, and was so disappointed because he did not fall upon it—“it’s all very well to meet now and then, and have a chat together, but you must not talk of marrying me, you know. I wonder what father would say if he heard you. Why, I ain’t seventeen till next December!”

“And I was but eighteen last month. We are only a boy and girl now, dear Rosie—of course I know that; but when I am twenty-one I shall have my money and be able to do as I like, and if we love each other, darling, the time will soon slip away. Only three more years, Rosie. Only thirty-six months, and then you *will*, won’t you?”

“I will what?” pouted the beauty.

"Marry me, darling! And we'll take a little house close to your father and mother, and be so happy."

"I don't know," said Rosie, shaking her head. "I'm not sure that I shall marry anybody. It would be such a bother."

"I wouldn't bother you," said Fabian softly. "I would sit in my painting-room all day, and you should do just as you liked."

"But father will never let me go!"

"Oh yes, he will, when the time comes. Fathers always say 'no' at first, I believe; and who could blame Mr. Barnes for wishing to keep you. You are so lovely, Rosie. You do not half know how beautiful you are."

"Don't!" exclaimed the girl, colouring with pleasure. She knew well enough how good-looking she was; too well, indeed, for she estimated her beauty far above truth or honour.

"And you love only me, Rosie?"

"Of course I love you, Fabian. How many more times am I to tell you so!"

"But *only* me. There is no one else whom you would allow to walk, as I am walking now, with his arm about your waist, is there? There is no one else who has the right to kiss your lips, darling, as I kiss them now?"

"But I don't see how *you* have the right," replied the girl, evasively.

"Oh yes, I have! The right of love. I have loved you such a time, Rosie. Let me see—how long is it since we first met in this nut-walk? More than six months, I declare. And since then I have had but one thought in my heart and one desire—the thought of you, the wish to marry you."

"I know that you have been awfully good to me, Fabian," replied Rosie, with somewhat of a conscience-stricken air, "but I wish you wouldn't make so sure we shall be married. You might change your mind, you know."

"Never! I shall die first! And so will you, won't you, Rosie?"

"Oh yes, of course," said his companion; but something in the inflection of her voice alarmed him.

"Are you not true?" he asked quickly. "Haven't you been telling me for all these months that you never loved anyone before me, and never should again? Have you seen anybody you like better, Rosie? Are you tiring of me?"

"Fabian! What nonsense! As if I could! I wish you wouldn't speak so horrid! You frighten me, and someone may overhear us!"

"I am so sorry, dear! Forgive me if I seem too

rough. But you don't know what your love is to me, Rosie. I think sometimes that if you were to leave me for any other man, I should kill him and you too!"

"Hush, hush!" cried the girl, in a hurried whisper. "There is someone coming! I am sure I heard a step through the shrubbery."

"No fear, darling! Who should come here at this time of the evening? Besides, they are all busy in the hay-field."

But Rosie was right. There was a footstep in the shrubbery path, and it was coming in their direction. The girl turned pale with alarm, and Fabian was utterly unable to account for her emotion.

"What matter if anybody does see us?" he said consolingly, as he threw his arm around her. "We are doing no harm, Rosie. Don't shake so, darling. There is no sin in taking a walk." And he kissed her cheek as he spoke.

At the same moment the nut bushes parted, and Andrew Hayes leaped on to the path. He was evidently as astonished to meet the lovers as they could be to see him. At first he appeared almost doubtful of their identity, but as Rosie Barnes uttered what seemed to Fabian a most unnecessary scream, he came quickly towards them.

"Rosie!" he exclaimed, "and Fabian! what on earth are you two doing here?"

"I don't see what right you have to inquire, Andy," replied his cousin, "and I think you would have shown better taste in keeping to the shrubbery when you saw the nut-walk was occupied."

"I've got every right, and Rosie knows it," said Andrew, angrily. "Take your hands off the girl, Fabian."

"I shan't do any such thing," exclaimed the other, throwing his arm still closer round his companion, who tried all she could to evade the clasp.

"Well, then, I'll make you," cried young Hayes, as he rushed towards them. But Rosie Barnes had disentangled herself from Fabian's hold by this time, and met Andrew half-way.

"Andy, be quiet, for my sake! I'll explain everything to you by-and-by, if you'll be good. Fabian and I were only taking a little walk together. We met quite by accident——"

"It's not true! We met by appointment," interpolated Fabian.

"And what right have you to make appointments with my sweetheart?" demanded Andrew.

"Your sweetheart? She's mine!"

"It's a lie! Rosie and I have kept company for the last three months. Ask her if we haven't."

Fabian stood still, thunderstruck. Andy was rough in speech and bearing towards him, but Andy and he loved each other, and he did not believe that he would tell him a falsehood on such a subject. So he did as his cousin desired him, he turned to Rosie Barnes, and, in an altered voice, asked her the question.

"Is this true, Rosie? Are you Andy's sweetheart?"

The girl began to cry, not from sorrow, but anger.

"I hate being bothered after this fashion," she said petulantly. "I'm nobody's sweetheart! I couldn't be! Father wouldn't let me, and I've told you both so a hundred times."

"That's not the point," replied Fabian; "have you been keeping company with Andy these three months and talking to him as you've talked to me?"

"Of course she has," exclaimed the other, "let her deny it if she can! Didn't you meet me in the alder-copse last night, Rosie, and give me the ribbon off your throat; and haven't you promised over and over again that if your governor will give his

consent, you'll marry me as soon as I'm able to keep a wife?"

"I couldn't promise that to anybody," repeated Rosie, "because we may all be dead before the time comes." But Fabian read the falsehood in her face.

"Andy," he said, in a low voice, turning to his cousin, "I've made a mistake. I didn't know Rosie was keeping company with you, and—she—she—ought not to have been too shy to tell me so. However, she's none the worse for a kiss or two from me, perhaps, and you may depend upon it *it will never happen again!*"

And, without another look at the girl who had deceived him, Fabian dashed down into the shrubbery, and left Andy and his sweetheart alone together.

CHAPTER X.

A Hero's Resolve.

ALTHOUGH he was such a lad that most people would have laughed at, instead of sympathising with, his disappointment, Fabian felt it bitterly. It must be remembered that he was of a poetic and imaginative temperament, and possessed a mind far in advance of his years. It was not this that had caused him to fall in love with Rosie Barnes, but it was this that made the fact of her having deceived him ten times more bitter than it would otherwise have been. He had trusted her so entirely. He knew that she was young, unformed, and careless, but he had never dreamt but that she was true.

Circumstances in the future might cause her to alter her mind (so he had thought), but he felt certain that what she affirmed in the present she believed from the very bottom of her heart. And now to find that she had been lying to him all along; that whilst she suffered his caresses and accepted his vows of fidelity, she had been carrying on just the same game with Andy—his brother and his best friend! It was very galling.

But Fabian accepted the fact in a very different spirit from what most boys would have done. Eighteen is an impetuous and unreasoning age in the affairs of love, and the majority of youths in Mordham, supplanted in their affections, as he had been, would have commenced by abusing the girl and fighting their rival, and, finding neither plan had the effect of reinstating them in their former rights, would have ended by heartily hating them both.

But Fabian was cast in a higher mould. In the first place, when he had once read falsehood masked in Rosie Barnes's face, no power on earth could have replaced her on the pedestal she had occupied in his boyish heart. His horror of a lie was too great. With that discovery his idol had fallen. False and betrayed, she was even less than clay. She had lied, both to him and to Andy. She was no longer *his* Rosie, but a dishonourable girl whose word he could never again depend upon. Then, in the second place, Fabian, in addition to his other virtues, was very humble with respect to his own merits. He did not wonder, when he came to consider the circumstances, that Rosie should have preferred Andy, for, to his own taste, his cousin was far handsomer and more manly-looking than himself. Andrew loved outdoor sports also, as befitted a

country gentleman, and if he were upon occasion rather wild for his age, Rosie was accustomed to a little roughness of life in the men by whom she was surrounded, and would admire his character none the less for that.

Therefore Fabian's pure soul would not permit him to decry his rival only because he was such, and he was only sorry, for Andy's sake, that Rosie had not possessed the truth and courage to let him (Fabian) know when she had transferred her affections to his cousin. It never entered his head to quarrel with Andy because he had decoyed his sweetheart from him. It was not Andy's fault. That was evident enough from the entire ignorance he had displayed of Fabian's intimacy with the girl. The fault was Rosie's—only Rosie's—who had permitted him to love and caress her all the while that her heart was given to another! To be thus deceived and made a fool of was very, very hard to bear!

Fabian's grief for his own loss had not yet got the better of his indignation at this discovery, when Andy re-entered the house. The first words that greeted him were in the voice of his cousin, calling over the balusters:

"Come up here, Andy, I want to speak to you."

Andrew Hayes displayed no reluctance to enter Fabian's presence. He had too much confidence in his affection to fear his reproaches. But he looked the more guilty of the two as they encountered each other.

"You don't think I did it on purpose, do you, Andy?" was Fabian's frank inquiry.

"Well, I don't suppose you did, old boy," replied Andrew, casting himself into a chair; "but it's deuced hard lines for both of us, there's no doubt about it. And it's all the more awkward because of our living together, and the girl being in and out of the house all day long. I don't see how either of us is to give her up with any comfort. Though she swears she'll stick to me for the future, and I think I shall suit her better than you would, Fabian, after all!"

And most people, seeing Andrew Hayes's fine though rather coarse face and figure, as he lay back in the chair and pulled his yellow moustache, would have thought the same.

"I daresay you will, Andy," replied Fabian, quietly, "but that is not the question. Under any circumstances, whether she wished it or no, I should never have interfered between you and Rosie Barnes again. I have given her up, Andy, now and for ever."

"Whew!" whistled the other, "you can't have cared much for her then, old fellow. All the better for you!"

"It is of little consequence if I did or didn't. I had no idea she was your sweetheart, you may rest assured of that, or I never would have said a word to her! But look here, Andy, tell me the truth. Do you love her?"

"Of course I do! Like anything! Why, we've been meeting at one place and another regularly three times a week for the last three months, and she used to write me notes before that into the bargain; I'm awfully sweet on her, Fabian. I think she's out and out the jolliest girl for miles round Mordham, and I'd marry her to-morrow if I could. Like a shot!" ended Andy emphatically.

Fabian winced under the relation, but kept his countenance wonderfully. He, too, had considered her—not the "jolliest girl" he knew, but the most perfect specimen of womanhood he had ever met. And now—what did he think of her? But his generous heart would not betray its broken idol.

"Well, then, look here, Andy—I'm going away."

"Going away! What the dickens should you do that for?"

"Because what you said just now is true. It will be difficult under the circumstances for us all

to live together in comfort. The fact is, Andy (I don't mind telling you, who are just like my own brother) but I have made a bit of a fool of myself about Rosie. She didn't like to let me know, I suppose, that she was keeping company with you——"

"Well, I told her to keep it quiet, of course, because of father," interposed Andy.

"Just so! and her secrecy was the reason of the mistake I made. I thought she was free, and I've let myself think rather more about her than was good for me——"

"I'm so sorry, Fabian!"

"There's no need to be, old fellow! Only, as things are, it will be best for both of us that I should leave the coast clear for you. So I shall tell uncle to-morrow that I've decided to be a doctor, and shall go up to London to walk the hospitals."

"What a bore! What am I to do without you? Bother the girl, Fabian! Take her and welcome. I'd rather give her up a dozen times over than lose you."

"My dear Andy, I appreciate your affection, but my remaining here would make no difference in the matter. Do you think I'm the sort of fellow to take another fellow's sweetheart from him, even if she

would have me! No! I feel I've been idle too long. Let me go away and learn my profession, and then, after a few years, when I come back to Mordham again, I shall be able to shake hands with my brother's wife, and forget altogether that I ever wanted her for my own."

"I say, Fabian, you're an awful brick!" ejaculated Andy. The "awful brick" was apparently busily engaged at that moment in adjusting the portrait of Rosie Barnes upon the easel, whilst he furtively brushed away the hot tears that had risen to his eyes.

"I shall finish this before I go, Andy," he exclaimed cheerfully a moment after, "and hang it up in your bedroom for a parting present. It is not very like her, you know, but you'll value it for the sake of what has happened this evening."

"It's a deuced sight better-looking than she'll ever be," said Andy, with anything but a lover-like air; "not that I don't think her pretty, but it'll be a long time before I forgive her for parting you and me. She must have told a lie to one or the other to get us into such a beastly scrape as this."

"No, no, Andy, don't think that," cried Fabian, quickly. "She is but a girl, you know, and they are all thoughtless. Perhaps she didn't quite know her own mind, and she liked the admiration of both of

us; but when I am gone, when she has only got you, she'll fix her heart firm enough upon you, never fear, and it'll all come right in the end."

"Well, I hope it may," replied his cousin; "but if I don't, there are plenty more girls to be had beside Miss Rosie Barnes, and so I shall take good care to let her know."

And this was the fashion in which the boy loved her, the boy for whom she had deceived Fabian's honest heart.

When Andrew had sauntered downstairs again, and Fabian was left alone, the pent-up grief would have its way. It is true that he despised her for her cowardice and want of truth; true that he would not have accepted the offer of her love if she had come and laid it with tears at his feet; yet there was much to be given up that he believed to be his own. Those ardent looks and kisses, the low-toned courtship, the promises of eternal fidelity! Even where there is no lasting feeling, these things are dear to the young and credulous, who make a heaven out of them, in which to live apart from the outer world. As Fabian recalled and wept over such, he forgot his contempt for Rosie's falsehood, and felt he could not have resigned them in favour of anyone—except Andy!

But what was the vow—the promise he had

made in gratitude to Andrew's mother—that he would share everything he had, down to his last farthing, with her boy, and she had died happy in that belief. Something came and whispered to Fabian at that moment that this did not include so sacred a possession as his first love, but he repudiated the suggestion as unworthy of him. Neither of them had Rosie's love. There was no doubt of that; but she liked them both, and would be ready to settle her affections upon whichever remained to claim them. So be it, then. Let Andrew win the prize. Fabian, young as he was, knew already that he should not long value a heart that was not entirely his own.

* * * *

As soon as the farmer returned from Norwich, his nephew broke to him the intelligence that he had determined to take advantage of the choice accorded him by his father's will, and commence his studies for the medical profession. Mr. Hayes attempted as before to dissuade Fabian from such an intention, but finding his resolution unaltered, he was compelled to give in to it. The only stipulation he made was that he should suffer himself to be placed under the charge of a doctor in Norwich, instead of going to London as he had proposed. By this means Hayes knew that at least half of Fabian's income would still remain in his own

pocket, and the lad made no objection to the plan; hard as his life had been at Mordham, it was yet his home—the only home he had known in England—and he had dreaded going forth alone into the wilderness of London without one friendly hand extended to him. Had it been possible to pursue his medical studies in Brusca, he would have returned joyfully to the land of his adoption, but the last seven years had made him too much of an Englishman to render it advisable he should enter himself as student in a foreign academy, where he would have to compete entirely with natives of the country.

In Norwich he should not feel quite so far away from Andrew and from Milly, who loved him. They would not be so completely separated but that they might still hold out a helping hand to one another in time of need. So to Norwich it was decided Fabian should go.

The lamentation at his departure was universal. From his cousins down to Anna and the stable-helper, there was not a dissentient voice in the house, everyone declaring that the life of it would depart with Fabian Delacourt. Farmer Hayes himself was the only one who refused to give an opinion on the subject, though even his natural surliness was increased by the secret knowledge that

he would have to curtail his domestic expenditure as soon as his nephew was gone. Milly wept in silence. The poor little girl was more grieved at the prospect of losing Fabian than anyone else; but she was not aware of it herself. She had grown up with her cousin, whose thoughtful, tender nature was far better suited to hers than Andrew's had ever been, until he had become a necessary part of her existence. But she did not come to a thorough knowledge of the truth until she was obliged to spend her days without him. After all, Andy, for whose sake he went, was the loudest in his expressions of disgust and disappointment at parting with his boon companion. More than once after the evening on which they made the mutual discovery of each other's love, did he attack Fabian in his painting-room, and beg of him to let bygones be bygones, and remain at Mordham. He had even offered never to speak to Rosie Barnes again himself, if his cousin would but resign his intention of going to Norwich. But this sacrifice, even had it been feasible on Andy's part, would have availed Fabian nothing. It was difficult to explain to the girl's lover why—to say, in fact, that in the face of her falsehood, he considered her unworthy the trust of any man. Besides, Andy could scarcely have understood him. What *he* called "love" was such a

very different feeling from that which his cousin had cherished. He had no appreciation of the finer phases of a woman's character, nor the delicacy of mind himself to consider honour in either sex as the bloom upon a peach or the dust upon an insect's wing, on which one touch, even the lightest, will leave its mark for ever.

Fabian loved his cousin all the more for the kindly feelings he displayed towards himself, but he could not help observing, even through them, what a wide gulf was placed between their natures, if not between their affections. One request which Andy brought him the evening before he left Mordham for Norwich, surprised Fabian as much as it touched him, because it proved his cousin's complete confidence in him. It was to the effect that he would see Rosie and wish her good-bye before he went. Several weeks had elapsed now since the encounter in the nut-walk, and Fabian had studiously avoided coming in contact with the girl who had deceived him. He did not wish to reproach her—being Andy's sweetheart—and he did not believe he could speak to her without doing so.

But now Andrew preferred the request as from himself, and Fabian did not like to refuse, for fear they should discover how much he suffered from the loss of her.

Yet he demurred awhile.

"I don't see the use of it, Andy," he said; "you can wish her good-bye and all sorts of happiness from me, and surely that will do as well!"

"No, it won't," replied his cousin, "for Rosie has been crying her eyes out about your going all the week. And she's afraid you're angry with her about this business, and wants to hear you say you're not."

Afraid he was angry with her! Good heavens! Had the girl already forgotten all she had said and sworn to him during those many secret meetings in the nut-walk? And now she could talk of his being "angry," as though the past were a mere matter of vexation!

"That's nonsense," he replied. "I have no right to be angry with anyone but myself. But if Rosie really wishes to see me, of course I can have no objection."

"Well, she's waiting for you in the parlour, and I've sent Milly down to the village; so now's your time, old fellow. And say something kind to her, for Heaven's sake, for I've been hardly able to get a word out of her for days past."

Fabian threw on his coat and went downstairs without further remonstrance. The interview was most unpalatable to him, and he wanted to get it

over as quickly as possible, as one sits down to have a tooth drawn.

"Well, Rosie," he exclaimed in a cheerful tone, as he advanced and took her hand, "and so you've come to wish me good-bye. Thank you for doing so."

As she turned at his voice, he saw that she had been crying.

"Oh Fabian! are you really going away, and all because of me?"

"Not at all. What put such an idea into your head? I am going to Norwich to commence to study to be a doctor. That has always been my desire, you know, Rosie—to be able to cut off arms and legs, though I hope *you* will never require my services to do either."

"*Don't!*" responded the girl, with a shudder. "Fabian, have you forgiven me? Are you sure you have got over it?"

"Got over what?"

"All my nonsense—you know—my flirting with Andy. You were so quick to believe me in the wrong—you never stopped to find out if I were in earnest or not!"

Still Fabian affected to treat the matter lightly. He felt that if he became serious he might appear too much so.

"I *knew* you were not in earnest, at least with me. But I'd rather not refer to that, Rosie. It's all past and over. Let us forget it."

"But I can't. I felt I *must* speak to you before you went. Oh Fabian, surely you know which of the two I love the best!"

Now it was really becoming serious. Rosie was trenching on Andy's rights, and without the least chance of reinstating herself in Fabian's favour. Like a true coquette as she was, she could not bear to lose one of her subjects, even though she could not hold them both.

The boy's brow overclouded. It was a difficult thing to speak to her, but pride and honour came to his aid.

"Rosie," he commenced quietly—very quietly, to hide how his lips trembled—"I do *not* know which of the two you loved the best, but I hope it was Andrew, for his sake and your own; for I shall never talk to you about such things again."

"Why?"

"Because—because—I will not share you with anyone."

"But if I was only *your* sweetheart—always—from this time?" she murmured.

"Are you false to Andy as well as to me?" he

exclaimed loudly; and then, seeing her frightened look, he continued:

"No, no; I was wrong. Forgive me for shouting in that fashion. But look here, Rosie! If you never saw Andy again from this moment, it would make no difference between you and me. So don't let us speak of it any more, please."

"The truth is, you never cared for me!" she pouted.

"Yes—yes—perhaps that is it—and I'm going away to-morrow, you see; so it would have been of no good if I had—and—and—oh Rosie," he burst out suddenly, with generous warmth, "say that you'll love Andrew, and be true to him, for he's a real good fellow, and I think he loves you."

"I don't know, I'm sure. I don't know anything. I'm sick of boys, and courting, and all the rest of it!" replied the offended beauty.

"I shall never forget you, Rosie," Fabian went on, in a softer, dreamy tone, "nor the look in your eyes, and the days when you thought you cared for me. But it was all folly, and I've wakened from it as if it had been a dream, and am glad to think that some day you will be Andy's wife. Be true to him, Rosie, for my sake!"

But Rosie did not answer. She was crying.

"Good-bye," said Fabian, holding out his hand.

She lifted up her eyes and looked at him, such bewildering, beautiful eyes as they were. But he turned slightly away.

"Good-bye," he repeated. "I am glad now that I have seen you once more; and remember that my last words were, 'Be true to Andy.'"

She tried to detain him, but before she had time to speak, Fabian had walked steadily out of the room and was gone. And Rosie Barnes felt instinctively that she had parted from one who was in every respect her superior.

In another week Fabian Delacourt was settled in Norwich under the roof of his master, and commenced the routine of a totally different life.

CHAPTER XI.

Fabian changes his Mind.

THE change from a country to a town life, from days passed in dreamy indolence to a course of active employment which could barely be accomplished in twelve hours, was of much service to Fabian Delacourt, and at first he thought he liked it. The idea of being a doctor had always appeared to him a great and good one. To be able to relieve the suffering, to carry comfort to the sick, sometimes even, as it were, to raise the dead to life, seemed only next to the sacred offices for which the Divine Physician entered the world. It had been his dream from a child, and it may be remembered how vexed his poor father was when Fabian carelessly threw on one side the question of becoming an artist or a musician, to aver his greater desire of doing good to men's bodies than of elevating their minds. But, like many worldly dreams which appear so fair in the distance, and "turn to ashes in the mouth," the vision which the child and the youth had dilated on did not realise his expectations when he grasped it. His young mind had rushed on too far in ad-

vance, and dwelt only on the moment when he should stand up a saviour and deliverer amongst men. He had overlooked or forgotten all the hard study that had to be gone through beforehand—the many drawbacks and disappointments—the hours of dulness, when his brain would appear incapable of grasping the simplest meaning—the hours of despair, when he would deride his own presumption for attempting to tread so intricate a path, and feel inclined to throw it all aside and return to Mordham to vegetate for the remainder of his existence. Such feelings are common to all in the pursuit of any branch of science. The mere preliminary instruction may be easy enough, but once well “in the wood,” the mind, unused perhaps to exert its mental muscle, becomes overstrained, and feels as though it must give in altogether. In such cases, it is only by walking on, regardless of pain and fatigue, that a man hardens himself to such a pitch of endurance that he can accomplish anything. Fabian had to undergo all these phases, and, although he had a good and clever instructor, the second year of his sojourn in Norwich found him just in the very thick of the battle—struggling hard to comprehend matters as yet too much for him—making greater efforts than a less capable mind would have taken the trouble to do, and exhausting himself the more for

that very reason. Often he felt just what has been described above, a sickening conviction that he had altogether overrated his abilities, and could never rise to fill the higher branches of his profession. Mr. Sutton, the gentleman to whom he was articled as a pupil, thought himself that Fabian was of far too sensitive and highly-strung an organisation to make a good surgeon; at the same time he knew that, if he persevered, the very feelings that now stood in his way would prove his most powerful allies. They were sorry masters, but would make excellent slaves. Meanwhile he took a great interest in the boy, and tried all he could to make his new life pleasant to him. He encouraged his talents, both for painting and music, and bade him use them as relaxations from his more important studies. But Fabian was not happy. He had quite recovered his disappointment concerning Rosie Barnes; that is to say, he did not allow it to lie on his mind and make him miserable, though it had so far sobered him that he had not found one pretty girl in all Norwich to tempt him to replace her image in his heart. But he fretted after the society of his cousins, and was fain to confess that the dreary life at Mordham, the only pleasures in which were forbidden ones, was better than the companionless days he dragged out in Norwich. Mr. Sutton had no family,

and though his wife did all she could to render Fabian's residence under their roof homelike and agreeable to him, he felt it to be so dull that he always preferred his own chamber and his book of study to an evening passed in Mrs. Sutton's drawing-room.

Then, again, the society of the medical students at the hospital was not at all to his taste. They were a rough, underbred set of lads; not quite so lawless, perhaps, as their brethren of the London hospitals are reported to be, but lower in tone and less companionable. Fabian could laugh and talk with them between the times for lectures, but, once free from the hospital wards, he did not care to carry their topics of conversation into his private life. His affectionate and somewhat womanly heart required sympathy and companionship at home. He was the sort of boy who would have loved a mother or a sister dearly, and would be the fondest of fathers and husbands. But he was doomed to a peculiarly isolated existence, so far as his feelings were concerned, and that fact made him fix his affections on Andrew Hayes more securely than under happier circumstances he would have done. For each year seemed to create a greater gulf between the characters of these two young men, and yet each year seemed to draw them closer together,

or rather to draw Fabian closer to Andy. He thought of no one, and wrote to no one, but his cousin, and during two years of absence he was the only person he had expressed a wish to see. Twice during that period had Andrew Hayes travelled down to Norwich to visit the young student, though by what means he had procured the money to do so it had never entered the latter's honest heart to question. And now the third year of Fabian's absence had commenced, and one dark day in the month of November he was gladdened by the intelligence that his cousin was in the parlour, waiting to see him.

"Ask young Mr. Hayes to stop a night or two, and share your room, if it is agreeable to him," Mr. Sutton had said, as he announced the news to his pupil, and Fabian had rushed downstairs with the delightful consciousness that he should have Andy's company for a couple of days.

They had not met for six months, and the alteration in both was so apparent that each started as he beheld the other.

"By Jove, Fabian, you have got on! A beard coming, I declare! Why, you're ahead of me. Well, I suppose we shan't be able to write ourselves down 'boys' much longer."

"More's the pity, Andy. The boys have the best of it, depend on it. But this is delightful, to see

you again, old fellow! I couldn't have stood expatriation much longer. I meant to have run up to the old place and spent Christmas with you."

"How are you getting on, Fabian?"

"Very well, as far as the practice goes—at least, so Sutton says; but, Andy, I shall never make a good doctor—I dislike it more and more every day."

"Whew! That's a bad look-out! Two years thrown away. What will the governor say?"

"He has no right to say anything," replied Fabian, proudly. "I shall be of age in another twelvemonth, and mean to judge for myself. But don't call it time thrown away, Andy; I've learnt more than I ever did in my life during these two years; and no study can ever be wasted."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"I cannot say. I have not even decided to abandon the profession. Perhaps I may make a start before long, and fall in love with it again. But I have been in correspondence with my dear old friend Père Raoul lately, and he advises me not to go on with the study of medicine unless my heart is in it. I will not go up to London, however, until I have finally decided. But if I feel no greater inclination for it next year than I do this, I shall go over to Brusca, I think, and place myself under an

artist there. Painting is, I believe, after all, my destiny. My father's blood is too strong in me. I cannot keep my thoughts away from it; and Sutton would be horrified if he knew that half the time when he is discoursing on the formation of the human body to me, I am thinking how the muscles are placed, not with regard to disease, but to a good position for the canvas."

"I see you *will* go to Brusca, old fellow," said Andy.

"I fancy so. What is bred in the bone, they say, is hard to get out of the flesh."

"And you'll leave me to rot in Mordham," added his cousin, lugubriously.

"No, Andy, no," cried Fabian, seizing his hand; "I couldn't leave you. I should be coming back in a couple of months to see how you were. You must come with me, dear boy! We'll find you some work to do there as well, and we'll live together as happy as two kings."

Andrew laughed incredulously.

"What should I do in a fine French town? I'm fit for nothing but farming, and know precious little of that! Besides, is it likely the governor would let me go? He grows stingier every day, Fabian. You'd hardly believe the pass things have come to unless you saw it."

"Come into my room, Andy—there is a nice fire there—and we'll talk over these matters in private."

The two young men—for at the age of twenty they really had claim to be called so—went upstairs and sat down on either side of the fireplace.

"How comfortable Sutton seems to make you, Fabian. I shouldn't give up this berth in a hurry, if I were you."

"He treats me very well," replied Fabian, "and so does his wife. I have nothing to complain of except myself. But if I stick to the profession, I should have to leave Norwich soon and go up to London; and, to tell you the truth, Andy, I feel as if I couldn't do it. But what's all this about uncle?"

"It's come out about Rosie, and there's been no end of a row."

Fabian slightly changed colour. He had known for a year past that Rosie Barnes and his cousin considered themselves engaged to be married to one another, but he had not yet quite schooled himself to speak of her without some degree of confusion.

"How did it come out?"

"She told her mother, I believe, and then Mr. Barnes spoke to the governor, and said if it was to be, they'd better come to some understanding in the

matter. And that's natural enough you know, Fabian; for she's an only daughter, and I'm an only son, and Barnes and the governor farm pretty nearly the whole of Mordham between them."

"Mr. Barnes is willing to give you Rosie, then?"

"Well, he says she might do better and she might do worse; but I don't think he'd make any trouble about it, if father would only be reasonable. But not a bit of it. He stormed and raved as if he'd never heard of such a thing as marriage in the world, and wanted to know what I should ask for next, and went on just like a madman. He wouldn't even say if the farm is to come to me at his death or not, or if he'd let me have a share in it. So Barnes couldn't make anything out of him, and there the matter dropped."

"Dropped! Are not you and Rosie engaged then?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so; but I don't know if it'll ever come to anything."

"But, Andy, you are twenty years old. You should look out for something to do that you may be able to marry her by-and-by."

"What, and leave father? I shall lose all chance of getting anything out of him if I did that? I don't see how he can will the farm away from me—it's freehold property you know."

"But would you rather have the farm than Rosie?" demanded Fabian, in amazement.

"Blest if I know! Any way I couldn't keep her without the farm, and I don't think she'd care about taking a labouring man either. Why, you don't know the shameful way in which the governor treats me, Fabian. It's the talk of the village. He keeps me like a child. I can't buy a new tie to walk out with Rosie in, without screwing the money out of him, shilling by shilling."

"How is it, then, he gives you the coach-hire down here, Andy? And all to see me, whom I really believe he hates."

Andrew Hayes looked conscious, and did not immediately answer the question. But innocent Fabian took no notice of the omission. He only thought something had gone wrong with the stem of his cousin's pipe.

"Well!—you see——" commenced young Hayes, after a pause, "I do a little business now and then for the farmers. Nothing *infra dig.*, you understand, Fabian; but a fellow must have a few odd coppers occasionally, and since it wouldn't look well to see my father's son begging, I——"

"I understand!" exclaimed Fabian, brightly. "You earn money by the labour of your hands, and you spend it to come down and see me. Thank

you, dear Andy; but it is a shame uncle should allow you to do it."

"He knows nothing of it," interrupted the other, quickly.

"He *ought* to; and he should if I had *my* will, Andy. To think of Mr. Hayes's only son being compelled to do farm-work like a common village lad in order to earn a few shillings! It's outrageous. What does Mr. Barnes say to it?"

"He knows no more of it than the governor! I expect he'd forbid Rosie to speak to me if it came to his ears. Don't mention it again, Fabian, for Heaven's sake."

"Of course I won't. If I only had my money in my own hands though, Andy, you shouldn't do it. But uncle has made as hard a guardian as he is a father. The pocket-money Mr. Sutton insists upon his allowing me will barely buy my tobacco; and as for my clothes—well, they do for Norwich, and that's not paying the town a compliment. If I were not to come of age so soon, I couldn't stand it much longer. I have often thought of complaining to my other guardian, M. Fevrier. But the thought of my approaching freedom restrains me."

"You are a lucky fellow, Fabian," sighed Andy. "I look forward to nothing but fetters during my father's lifetime."

They turned the conversation at that juncture, for it was not one to increase the pleasure of a few hours that they had to spend together, but it cropped up again during the time that Andrew Hayes remained in Norwich. Once he alluded rather coarsely to his cousin's better fortune, and complained bitterly that there should be so much difference between them.

"It does seem hard," he grumbled, "that one fellow should have everything, and another nothing. In another year you will be a free man, and I shall be tied to the governor's coat-tail till he chooses to kick the bucket."

"I don't quite see that, Andy," replied Fabian. "It is true I have five thousand pounds to start in life with, but then, you must remember, I am an orphan. Now your father will, at all events, afford you a home so long as you choose to accept it, and at his death you will be much better off than I myself."

"It is not certain. He's so cross-grained, he may turn round at the last and leave it all to Milly."

"And she would share it with you, I am sure. She has such a truly affectionate heart, and it is all yours. How is Milly, Andrew?"

"Rather mopish, but I believe she's all right.

She hasn't got Rosie's 'go' in her, Fabian, and she never will have. Milly's too quiet to suit me. But she does what she can to make the wretched place comfortable, and to keep the old man in good humour, so I ought to be obliged to her for me. I wish she'd get married though, for her own sake."

"Married! She's much too young for that," said Fabian, quickly.

"She was eighteen last birthday."

"Was she really? Well, of course she must have been when one comes to think of it, but it seems incredible. Little Milly turned into a woman."

"Yes; and a very pretty woman, too, some people think, though I confess I like more 'bounce' about a girl. But Jack Redding would give his eyes if Milly would only look at him."

"She mustn't marry in Mordham," interrupted his cousin. "There's no one good enough for Milly there."

"Then I expect she'll die an old maid, Fabian; for where else do you suppose she can go for a husband?"

"When you and Rosie are married you may be able to take her about with you, and show her a little of the world."

"Ah, *when* we are! Just so! And when *you're* married, my boy, you will be able to do ditto. The one chance is as good as the other—indeed, much

better. You will have something to keep a wife on; I—nothing!”

“I must stick to my resolution to spend Christmas at Mordham,” replied Fabian; “and then I shall be able to see Milly, and judge for myself.”

A month later, when he travelled up to the old place, he was astonished to find how much of his heart he had left there. The bare unfurnished rooms and whitewashed walls, which appeared all the worse for not having been viewed for two long years, yet seemed more pleasant in Fabian's eyes than the comfortable apartments he had vacated in Norwich; for his cousin Milly was there, ready to attend to all his wants, and Andy's cheerful voice made the “welkin ring.” The three young people were so pleased to meet again, indeed, that they quite ignored the farmer's surly humours, and for once in his life Mr. Hayes found himself in the abnormal condition of being unable to spoil Christmas for his unfortunate family. Could Mrs. Hayes, from her grave in the silent churchyard, have returned at that time to look in upon the children whom she had left with so perplexed and doubting a heart, she would have been ready to acknowledge that all her fears were groundless. Fabian and Andrew, grown into fine young men, and possessed of courage sufficient to fight their own battles and those of

Milly into the bargain, seemed as though they needed no one's help; whilst the girl moved from one to the other, hardly knowing which she cared for most, but with a claim upon each of them which neither would be slow to acknowledge when the time for action came. Notwithstanding the farmer's ill-temper, therefore, things seemed brighter than they had ever done before at Mordham Farm. The children had developed into beings well able to cope with the bugbear that had overshadowed their home from infancy, and if they could not subdue, to ignore it.

And the future looked as fair for them as it does for most. Only—if we sow tares in our youth we cannot expect to reap corn in our old age, and though an evil example and faulty training may seem for awhile to lie in abeyance and do no harm, sooner or later the seed which we have planted will bring forth its fruit, and perhaps when we least expect it.

* * * * *

Rosie Barnes was naturally much mixed up with the little gatherings at Mordham Farm, and Fabian Delacourt was greatly relieved to find after their first interview that she had lost her power to charm him.

Rosie, at nineteen, was so much more fully de-

veloped a young woman than she had been two years before, the delicate tints of her complexion had so considerably deepened in colour, and the outlines of her form lost their original grace, that she was no longer an object for a painter's dream, and that was the only light in which Fabian had feared she might still affect his senses. To find her, therefore, changed into rather too buxom a country lass, with boisterous manners that verged upon vulgarity, was the best reward he could have for the self-control he had displayed in his former relations to her. That she was, at some time or other, to be married to Andrew Hayes, seemed to be an acknowledged fact by all except the farmer, who chose to appear ignorant of what he well knew to be the case.

Miss Rosie was therefore a constant visitor at the farm, and the open courtship which she permitted Andrew to conduct often made Milly turn away with burning cheeks, under the influence of a feeling with which Fabian could well sympathise. More than once during this visit to Mordham, he spoke to his young cousin concerning his intentions for the future, and the part he hoped Andy might take in them. He found Milly so sensible and sympathetic, that he felt that he could repose his confidence in her with perfect security. She

agreed with all he said most heartily, and lamented the lack of independence in her brother's spirit as much as she did her father's harsh and grudging treatment of him. But she looked aghast at the notion of Andrew joining Fabian in making a home upon the Continent.

"What should I do without him?" she urged. "Would you leave me here all alone with father? Oh Fabian! you would never be so cruel!"

"Milly! when I promised your dear mother to be a friend to Andy, the promise included you. Whatever, then, I may be able to do for him in the future is at your disposal also. If we make a home together you will come too, and be a sister to both of us, will you not?"

"And leave father to die all by himself? Fabian, how could I? He has been a bad father to us—I acknowledge that freely—but still—what would mother have said? Does his conduct release us from our duty?"

"No, Milly; you are right. But do you think, then, that it is Andrew's duty also to remain at Mordham?"

"I do! whilst father lives. I wish he would give his consent to Andy's marriage with Rosie, and then my brother might feel more contented here. And I think father would, if he saw that Andy was more

willing to work to support a wife. But perhaps it will all come right by-and-by, and then——”

“Then,” exclaimed Fabian, eagerly, with a new thought flashing through his brain, “if Andy and Rosie were married and settled here, and uncle didn’t want you so much as he does now, you might be free to do as you chose, Milly, and you would come and live with me in Brusca, wouldn’t you?”

The girl coloured crimson.

“I—I——” she stammered. “How could I go to live with you, Fabian?”

“Why, as my sister and my housekeeper, of course. We would have such jolly little rooms, Milly, and go to theatres and all sorts of fun; and then you’d end by marrying a Frenchman, perhaps, and settling out there, and I should have you living close by me to the very end of my life. You’ve no idea how nice it would be!”

“No, I’d rather not,” said Milly, shaking her head; “I’d rather remain here with father and Andy, and I don’t think I should care to marry a Frenchman, Fabian; thank you all the same!”

Fabian was disappointed at her answer and the little interest she seemed to take in his future home, but though he did not renew the subject in her presence he often thought of it afterwards.

CHAPTER XII.

Fabian nearly proposes.

His Christmas visit to Mordham did not tend to make the hard, dry study he was forced to return to, in the dull old town of Norwich, more palatable to Fabian's taste. He became altogether too dreamy and abstracted for a student, and Mr. Sutton had occasion more than once to reprove him for want of attention and diligence. When in the lecture or the dissecting-room, indeed, where his interest was thoroughly aroused, his bright intelligent face might be observed to be the most earnest there; when his sympathies were touched, too, in the operating theatre, or by the bedside of some dying patient, no thoughts crossed his mind but such as were given to the sufferings before him, and the best means of alleviating them. But Fabian had work allotted to him to do in private; huge tomes, teeming with hard words and harder meanings, to carry back to his room and decipher by the force of his own understanding; and it was when the excitement of his labours was over, that he felt it so impossible to fix his mind upon the dry details that

were so essentially necessary for him to acquire before he attempted to turn theory into practice. Thus it was that the young, ardent, poetical nature, burning with its own beautiful dreams of an unattainable perfection, would lose itself in imagining what it *might* do, if the circumstances of this life would only give it fair play, and Fabian would wake up with a sigh, to con over again details of disease which disheartened him the more he knew of it, seeing how little at the best it is possible for science to do in battling against the inroads of mortality.

But other dreams than those of art mingled with Fabian's hopes for the future. Since his return to Mordham, and realisation of how much the want of a home (even such a sorry home as that had been) and congenial companionship meant for him, he had been occupied in considering how he could continue to make his own wishes tally with his cousins' good—his cousins, not only Andy, for whom he entertained so close an affection that he did not believe in a happy life spent apart from him, but also Milly.

Poor little Milly! so good, and patient, and long-suffering; so like her dead mother in her capacity for forgiveness, and her humble opinion of herself. Fabian could not leave her happiness out of the

calculation that included that of Andy and his own. What could he do single-handed to release these two friends from their domestic bondage? That was Fabian's speculation by day and night. Andy, he hoped, might be induced by-and-by to seek work away from Mordham, and near wherever he (Fabian) might be domiciled. Andy's love for Rosie should be a powerful incentive to him to create independence for himself; but Fabian was beginning to doubt if his cousin *did* love his betrothed as he ought to do. And his disagreements with his father, which were becoming apparently more common each day, were very likely, in an angry hour, to drive him forth from home to seek his fortunes elsewhere. And then how gladly would Fabian stretch out a helping hand, however feeble, to guide his feet upon dry land. But poor little Milly! What, in such a case, would become of her? How could they—her brothers—who had given so faithful a promise to her dying mother to protect her against her father's violence, leave her without a shield from his fury? It could not be. This part of the plan puzzled Fabian more than any other. He was certain that Andy and he could do no good in Mordham; as certain that they could not both leave it without Milly. Once the thought flashed across Fabian's mind, that the only means by which he could gain

the right to take Milly away from her father would be by making her his wife; and the boy, though alone, had blushed violently at the idea.

He loved Milly, but he was not the least in love with her. There is a wide difference between the two feelings. And whereas, had he been in love with his pretty cousin, he would have dwelt on the idea of marrying her with the greatest eagerness and delight, the notion of doing so without the passion to urge him on inspired him with modest shame.

He was very single-hearted, this Fabian, and very pure-minded, considering his sex. But though he put away the idea of marrying Milly when it first arose, as an impossibility created by his own wandering brain, he found it returned, again and again, until it began to take a more tangible shape, and no longer appeared to be such a piece of folly as it had done.

Milly to live with Andy and himself for ever; they who had suffered and enjoyed so much together as children, to be linked for life in a threefold cord of friendship that could never be broken; Milly moving about his house, administering to his wants, sympathising with his work, and sharing his pleasures—what a pleasant picture the idea conjured up! She would be to him, perhaps, all that his

mother had been to his father, a household angel and a friend, to whom he might turn in every trouble or perplexity. And her mother, looking down upon them (as Fabian firmly believed she did look), would see that he had kept his promise to her, and shared all he possessed with the children of her love. These day-dreams were very beautiful, and, it may be, did more real good to the generous young heart that dreamed them than any amount of study would have done; but they interfered sadly with it, and Fabian's progress began closely to emulate that of the tortoise, who takes a step forward and two back. Mr. Sutton, on examining what amount of work his pupil had accomplished by the end of the week, would take him severely to task for wasting his time and the money expended on his education.

"This will never do, Mr. Delacourt," he would say sternly, "you will do no credit to me or to yourself if you go on in this fashion, and you will force me to communicate on the subject with your uncle if I see no improvement in your application. If you choose to rob him of the annual sum he pays for your board and education, I cannot consent to abet you in it. You know less than you did last Christmas. It is disheartening to a degree, and discreditable to both of us—positively discreditable!"

But whatever were Fabian's faults, he possessed one sterling virtue. He was the soul of honour, and neither Mr. Sutton nor anybody else ever got a lie or an excuse out of him. He acknowledged his indolence freely, and he also acknowledged the cause of it.

"I beg your pardon sincerely, Mr. Sutton. I know I must appear ungrateful, after all your kindness to me, as well as idle, but the fact is, I shall never be a doctor; I overestimated my capacity for good when I chose the profession. I thought that the mere consciousness that I was attempting to benefit my fellow-creatures would be sufficient reward for any trouble I might take; but it is not the case. I *cannot* interest myself in medicine or surgery, try as hard as I will. All the dry bones you place before me become covered, in my imagination, with flesh, and I am studying the component parts, not of a woman's skeleton, but of the figure of some nymph; and instead of thinking how I should set a fractured tibia or dislocated collar-bone, I find myself wondering how the light would fall upon her curves, or the shadows nestle beneath her chin or in the dimple of her cheek. And then you know, sir," said Fabian, simply, in conclusion, "*I am nowhere!*"

At this confession the tutor laughed most heartily.

It did not come as a revelation to him, so he could afford to be amused at it.

“Well, Delacourt, you are candid, at all events, and that is a great merit, and I quite agree with you that under the circumstances you had better not meddle any further with surgery. It might prove very awkward if one of these dreams were to enter your head at the very moment the fractured tibia was waiting your professional services. It would be very little consolation to the patient in her sufferings, I fear, to know that her dimple would be immortalised, or the shadows behind her ear figure on the next canvas you spoiled.”

“You are laughing at me, sir, but I know I deserve it for my folly. Only pray exonerate me from anything worse. The money which defrays my expenses I rob from no one. It is my own—laid aside by my dear father for this very purpose—and in a few months it will be mine unconditionally, to do as I will with.”

This conversation led to a complete explanation between Mr. Sutton and his pupil, which only made them faster friends. The tutor gave Fabian unprejudiced advice, counselling him by all means to follow the bent of his inclinations, and, as soon as he became of age, return to Brusca, and place him-

self under the care of Père Raoul and the tuition of M. Fevrier. There were reasons, as we have stated, why this plan could not be definitely settled by Fabian; but it was agreed between Mr. Sutton and himself that he should remain at Norwich until the momentous time of his coming of age arrived, and make his determination known to his uncle by letter instead of by word of mouth. This was done, and when Fabian heard, through Andy, of the storm which burst in consequence over the Mordham homestead, he could not but feel thankful he was well out of it. The farmer was not given to correspondence, but he sent his nephew a surly message, through his son, to the effect that he had received his letter, and, of course, he could do as he chose in the matter. In answer, Fabian wrote again, ignoring all knowledge of the unpleasant manner in which his determination had been commented upon, and saying that as soon as his twenty-first birthday, which fell due in May, had passed, he should run over to the farm for a few days, to settle up accounts with his uncle and to wish them all good-bye. Accordingly, at the time appointed, Fabian bade farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Sutton, and with a heart free as air, booked his place in the Norwich coach for the nearest point to Mordham. His cousin Andy met him where the coach stopped, with a face the

length of a hatchet; and Fabian, who had been beguiling his journey by building castles in the air, in which his cousin played no mean part, thought some fresh calamity must surely have occurred.

"Why, what on earth is the matter, old fellow?" he asked, as soon as they found themselves jogging homewards in the ramshackle gig which Farmer Hayes designated his "carriage;" "anything gone wrong with Rosie?"

"Rosie be blowed!" was Andy's elegant rejoinder. "What *should* be the matter except this affair of your going away? Milly and I haven't been the same creatures since we heard it for certain. She walks about like a ghost, and as for myself, I think I shall go before the mast, or enlist as a private. Anything will be better than hanging about that beastly farm, listening to the governor's ravings, when you are away for good and all."

"No, no, Andy. Don't say that. I have had a thousand plans in my head for you and me and Milly, but it's no use broaching one of them until we have had time to think of and talk them over. But I'm going to make my uncle grant me one favour, Andy, before I go."

"Grant you a favour! Well, if you do, it'll be the first favour he's ever granted in his life. You'll have to buy it of him if you mean to get it."

"And so I will if it be necessary. I'm going to ask him to let you come over to Brusca with me for a few weeks, and if he objects on the score of expense, why, I'll pay your journey out of my own money."

"Will you really? I say, Fabian, you are a regular brick, and no mistake. I shouldn't wonder if the old screw lets me go, if it's to save him paying for my grub for a few weeks."

"Of course he will. You'll be my guest, Andy, and we will have such fun. We'll cross straight over from the London docks to Antwerp, and we will see that fine old Flemish city together, and Bruges too, which is so full of historic interest, before we go on to Brusca. And when we get there——oh Andy!——the theatres——the operas——the open-air concerts——the galleries of painting and sculpture! How we shall enjoy the sight of them! The remembrance of them all seems to have come back to my mind so vividly since I have had the prospect of seeing them again, that I wonder how I can have remained in England so long. And I have been talking French in my sleep, Andy——actually. I woke up this morning with a long French sentence on my tongue, and could not believe for a moment but that I was again in Brusca."

"Ah! You'll have adopted your French coats and your French lingo again by this time six months, I expect, and forgotten there is such a place as Mordham."

"*Never!* Andy, never! Have *you* forgotten the promise I made your dear mother? That is the chief reason I want to get you over to Brusca with me, that we may find, if possible, work for you there, that may prevent further separation."

"I don't think that will be feasible, Fabian. You forget, if I give up my hopes of inheriting the farm I part with all my prospects in life."

"True!—and Rosie also. You would be obliged to part with her. I am very selfish, Andy! I have been thinking only of my own pleasure, and forgetting what will be most for your good."

"Yes, I don't suppose Rosie would like my going away altogether; but it's the farm I am thinking of. There are lots of girls in the world to be had for the asking, Fabian, but if the governor took it into his head to leave Mordham Farm to Emily or some of his own people, why, I should just be penniless."

"Of course you would," replied Fabian, with a deep sigh, and he became so grave that Andy tried to rally him out of his dejection.

"I say, old fellow, if you take to your French-

cut coats or hats, there's one thing you won't be able to put on again."

"What is that?"

"Those long curls you brought to Mordham. My eye! What a guy you looked! I never shall forget my first sight of you."

The young men laughed heartily at the remembrance, and then Andy said:

"I came across them the other day, Fabian, and roared as much as I have done now. How comical you used to look with them all hanging like ropes down your back and over your eyes."

"You came across them—where?"

"Amongst some of poor mother's things. They were all carefully pinned up in paper. She cut them off, you may remember, and I suppose she kept them for your sake. By Jove! They're a pretty colour, though—red-brown, something like Rosie's."

"I hope you burned them, Andy."

"No, I didn't. I was going to, when that little fool, Milly, swooped down on the lot and carried them off to her room. She's deuced sweet on you, Fabian, that girl is! I wish to goodness you could see it in the same light and take her out of this dull hole!"

This idea—it was nothing more—so like some that had been running in Fabian's own head, made him redden visibly.

"You don't mean what you say, Andy, do you?"

"Well, no! It wouldn't be fair to the girl to make more than a joke of it, but she likes you awfully. I'm sure of that. And girls will marry anyone that asks them."

"She was always fond of me," replied Fabian, simply. His cousin's ideas of the fair sex did not tally with his own. Girls who would "marry anyone" were not the sort of girls he should have asked to be his wife; but he did not believe it of Milly. He thought much too highly of her. When they reached Mordham, they found her waiting for their arrival in the parlour. She blushed deeply when Fabian asserted his old cousinly privilege of kissing her, but there were traces of tears on her cheeks, which she could not hide.

"Hallo! What's up now?" exclaimed her brother, as he unceremoniously turned up her face with his hand. "What have you been piping about, Milly, eh?"

"Oh, never mind, Andy; it's nothing," she replied, with evident embarrassment.

"By jingo! it is something, though, and I mean to know what!"

"I can tell you, Mr. Andrew," said a servant who was laying the table for tea. "The master's been making a horrible rummage about here all the afternoon, and abusing us like one o'clock, and when Miss Emily here just stuck up for you, or Mr. Fabian—I forget which—he seized that footstool and just hull'd it at her head as if she'd been a dog! I'd like to have given 'un a bit of my mind, I would, and he'd have got it, too, and no mistake," she continued energetically, as she thumped down the crockery in proof of her good will.

"The brute!" sneered Andrew. "He never dares touch her in my presence. He knows I'd hit him as soon as look at him, that I would! Come, Milly, it's no good blubbering about it. Least said soonest mended, my girl, and it shan't happen again if I can prevent it. You may take your oath of that." For Emily had laid her head down on the table and was sobbing as if her heart would break. Fabian approached his cousin and took a seat by her side.

"Was it *for me*, Milly?" he whispered softly, with his mouth close to her ear. She did not answer, but he saw her ear redden at the question.

"Tell me," he continued, "was it for *my* sake you received this insult, or for Andy's?"

"Father is always talking against you and calling you bad names," she said between her sobs, "and since he has heard you are going to leave us, he has been worse than ever. And this afternoon he said—oh! I can't repeat it—it was too horrible! But it was untrue, and I said so—and—and—then he got in a rage and struck me."

"Milly, how can I ever thank you enough for taking my part in my absence? I wish I could bear two thousand blows if they would wipe out the remembrance of this one from your mind. But I am powerless to do more than thank you."

The girl had risen from her seat by this time, and walked to the open window, where Fabian followed her. They were alone together, Andy having taken the horse and gig round to the stable and the servant returned to her colleagues in the kitchen.

"How can I help you?" said the lad, as he took his cousin's hands and held them in his own. "Is there any way, Milly, to stop uncle's cruel treatment of you both?"

She shook her head.

"None, Fabian! It has been so from the beginning. It will continue so to the end."

"It is enough to put me out of conceit of going to Brusca. How can I leave you and Andrew to bear the brunt of all this by yourselves?"

"You would do no good by staying with us, Fabian. No one and nothing has ever been able to do us any good. Poor mother died under the curse of his bad temper, and I suppose I shall die under it too."

"No, Milly! by Jove you shan't," exclaimed Fabian, eagerly; "that is, if I have any power to prevent it. I have enough money now, dear, to make a home in a Continental town like Brusca, and by-and-by I hope by my own exertions to be able to have much more; and all that I have or make is yours, Milly, if you will accept it—if you will share my home."

"Oh Fabian!" cried the girl, colouring from brow to bosom, "I told you once before, when you spoke of the same thing, that it was impossible. You feel like a brother towards me, but I am not your sister. And even if father would consent to let me go, I could not accept your offer. It would not be right—it would not be proper—it——"

"But if," said Fabian, interrupting her, "I were to ask you to come to me—*not* as a sister, Emily! We have been brought up as brother and sister, but we are only cousins, remember! And if——"

"Hush, hush!" said the girl, quickly, as a step was heard in the passage, "stand farther away from me, Fabian, for mercy's sake. Here is my father!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Fabian is called a Thief!

As Farmer Hayes entered the room, Fabian felt undecided whether he should shake hands with him or not. He was perfectly free and independent of his uncle, and, had he followed the dictates of his inclination, he would have told him frankly what he thought of the cowardly treatment to which he had subjected his daughter. His heart was burning at the relation of what the poor child had suffered; but he was aware that, if he wished to benefit her or Andy, he must begin by conciliating their father. We meet with so much deception and double-dealing in this world, that, if we are not utterly to go to the wall, it is incumbent on us to meet our enemies with their own weapons, and to smother natural candour under policy. Fabian felt this keenly as he advanced to meet his uncle. He had a positive aversion to take the farmer's coarse hand in a semblance of friendship, and wish him good-day, as though he had heard nothing to his disad-

vantage. But had he not known it to be necessary, Milly's imploring look and gesture of fear would have urged him to the action. He could not have found it in his heart to make the present more unpleasant to her, nor the future more to be dreaded than it was.

"So you've arrived!" remarked Farmer Hayes, in no very cordial tone, as he sat down and drew off his clumsy, soiled boots, and threw them, with a clatter that made Milly start, to the other end of the room; "and you've determined to give up the pill-box for the paint-box, and make a fool of yourself after all, eh?"

"Well, it would be difficult for me to make a fool of myself, uncle, as, according to your usual estimate of me, I am a fool ready made," returned Fabian, with a light laugh.

There was a dash of sarcasm in that laugh that considerably nettled the farmer. It was not much, but it meant a great deal. It meant freedom, independence, and the power to laugh without asking leave of anybody.

And that was not the way that the people whom Mr. Hayes was accustomed to see gathered round his festive board were in the habit of laughing. It reminded him that his nephew was no longer in

dread of his displeasure, and it stung him like a horse-fly.

"What do you mean?" he commenced to Fabian, but thinking better, stopped short, and vented his wrath upon Milly instead. "Here, girl; make haste and pour out the tea, will you? Do you want to keep me waiting about here half the evening, whilst you stand picking your fingers at the window? Do you suppose I work hard to keep a strapping lass like you to do nothing but amuse yourself? Pass the bread. Where's the butter? Didn't I order the sausages I left at breakfast to be kept for my tea? Why hasn't Rebecca put them on the table? Ring the bell and ask. If those hussies have eaten them in the kitchen, I'll know the reason why. But it's your business to look after such things. You're no use in the house at all. I might just as well bring in one of my scarecrows, and put the keys in its hand, as trust them to you."

"But, indeed, father, I have not forgotten them," said Milly, humbly, as she opened the sideboard door. "I put the sausages away for you here on purpose that there should be no mistake about them."

"And do you mean to tell me that you've kept meat in that cupboard the whole of to-day, with the

weather as hot as ever we've had it for the time of year?" roared the farmer. "Why, you're a born fool—an idiot. No one but a darned idiot would have done such a thing. You wanted me to get cholera, perhaps, or typhoid fever, or some other disease from eating sour meat. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You're not worth your salt! A great idle, hulking, worthless girl."

"Oh father! father! indeed I did it for the best!" sobbed Milly, as the sausages flew from the farmer's hand to join the boots at the opposite side of the room.

"Hang your best," growled Hayes. "You're the moral of your mother. Everything you do is wrong, but it is always *for the best!* Go and pick up those sausages. Do you hear?"

Fabian was boiling with indignation, but he dared not show it. It would have charmed him to have taken hold of his uncle's coat collar, and kicked him out of his own house and round his farm. And he could have done it too, for, though slightly built, he was muscular, and had the advantage of youth and the knowledge how to use his fists. It would have been a case of the greyhound opposed to the coarsely-bred bull-terrier, but still an open question whether blood would not have won the day. But

where would have been his chance of befriending Emily and Andrew, had he obeyed the dictates of his nature? It would have been an immense comfort to him to redress his cousin's wrongs, and pay out his uncle for nine or ten years of tyranny, at one and the same time; but Fabian recognised the selfishness of the indulgence, and, as the story of his future life will prove, unselfishness was his most prominent virtue. Yet, affection for his pretty cousin, combined with the natural gallantry of his nature, prevented him from witnessing such a disgraceful scene as the above in silence. He sprang from his seat and forestalled her in executing her father's command.

"Excuse me, Milly," he said, as he took the plate from her hands, "but I cannot permit you to do this. Allow me to restore your father's sausages to him," and down on his knees went Fabian to recover the scattered dainties. The girl submitted, but as she did so, she looked timidly round to see how her father would take the circumstance.

"A very fine gentleman," sneered Farmer Hayes. "I suppose all this fandangled politeness is a remnant of your foreign education, Mr. Fabian. We're not used to it at Mordham."

"I never thought you were, uncle!" replied

young Delacourt, as he placed the dish of sausages before him.

"What the devil do you mean by this, sir?" demanded the farmer, regarding them.

"Why, didn't you say you wanted them picked up for you?"

"But not to *eat*! Do you suppose that I am going to touch meat that's been kicking amongst my old boots that have just come out of the straw-yard?"

"I didn't know what you might not be accustomed to do in Mordham, uncle. Nor did I think you would have ordered my cousin Emily to pick up the meat you threw across the room, unless it were necessary."

"It strikes me, sir, you mean to be impertinent," observed the farmer.

"Not at all. On the contrary, I am vexed to think anything should disturb the harmony of my first meal in the old place. But as you don't like to see the sausages, we'll give them to Carlo;" and throwing up the casement, Fabian quietly threw the contents of the plate to the house-dog.

The farmer, who had only objected to the restoration of the meat because it had been restored,

and had intended quietly to appropriate it as soon as general observation had been diverted from his actions, now felt really aggrieved, but did not know how to express it. Fabian was at Mordham Farm to settle up accounts, and there were arrears due, as well as the next six months' interest to be paid in advance, so he thought it best for several reasons not to go too far. At this juncture, however, Andy joined the party, and Fabian having persuaded Milly to sit down to the tea-table, the meal proceeded for awhile in peace.

"You don't ask me about my future plans, uncle," said Fabian, who was anxious to gain an opening to make his request concerning Andy.

"Future fiddlesticks! What plans should a lad of your age have? You'll drink half your principal and dissipate the other half, and you'll be rotting in your grave in a couple of years, without sufficient money left behind to bury you decently. That's my prophecy of your future plans!"

"Oh father!" deprecated Milly.

"You're a cheerful party to consult about anything, I *must* say," observed his son.

"Your predictions don't affect me," said Fabian, cheerfully, "because I know it lies in my power to

falsify them. I've never been drunk yet, uncle, nor extravagant, and I don't mean to begin now! I am going straight over to Brusca to become a painter like my father. Perhaps in a year or two I may go to Rome to study, but in everything I mean to be guided by the advice of my dear old friend Père Raoul."

"A Papist!" sneered Hayes.

"Ay, uncle! but one of the best men God ever made. Oh, he is so good! You do not know! He spends all his money in rescuing poor boys from the streets and sending them out to Batavia to get work there. M. Fevrier says he saved hundreds in that way."

"Perhaps he may assist you by-and-by, then, when you've run through your money," growled the farmer, "for it will be no use your applying to me. You do well to stick to your rich friends, Fabian. Your father did the same before you, and died worth five thousand pounds, though no one knows how he made it!"

"*Everyone* knows how he made it," replied Fabian, excitedly. "He earned it by hard work, as I hope to earn money too; and not by sticking to rich friends, as you most unfairly insinuate. No one ever did anything for my father but himself; and no one has ever done anything for me but him!"

"What do you call being taken into my house and fed and clothed for ten years then, you ungrateful young hound?" demanded Hayes.

"You've been paid for it," answered his nephew, coolly, "and well paid, too. I know the value of money now much better than I used to do. By-the-way, uncle, when will you be ready to go over the half-year's accounts with me, for I wish to know exactly how I stand before leaving England?"

This allusion sobered the farmer. He almost wished he had not spoken so roughly.

"Are you in such a deuce of a hurry to leave us?" he asked.

"Not at all; but it can make no difference to my departure when you hand over my money."

"Your cousins will feel your going," continued Hayes; "you might spare them a couple of weeks before rushing off to the other side of the world."

This amenity, so vastly dissimilar to the usual way in which Mr. Hayes treated the idea of affection, made his son and daughter stare, and emboldened Fabian to open the subject which lay nearest his heart.

"Uncle, I have a favour to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"I want you to spare Andrew for a few weeks."

"What for?"

"To go to Brusca. It will be a holiday for him, and a real pleasure to me. It will soften the pain of parting from Mordham; and though I have not always been quite happy here, and you may hardly believe what I say, this old place has been my home for many years past, and I sincerely love it."

But his nephew's proposal had awakened an avaricious thought in the farmer's breast, and he fancied he saw his way to make use of it. Since Fabian so much regretted leaving them (and he knew the lad's candour too well of old not to believe him), it might be feasible to work on his feelings so as to induce him to remain a few months longer at the farm. And Mr. Hayes's affairs were in a very embarrassed condition. No one cared for him or his interests, and he was cheated and robbed on all sides. A few months' delay might turn the tide in his favour. The interest of Fabian's money to the end of the year, small as it was, would be a great boon to him in the present state of the exchequer; and to have to pay up the arrears due would seriously inconvenience him. But in order to keep his nephew at Mordham, he must not allow Andrew to leave home, even for a few weeks. All this flashed

through his mind in a moment, and his denial was given shortly and at once.

"I am sorry for you, Fabian, but I can't spare him. It's your own fault that you're leaving the farm, you know. You might stay on with us if you chose; but any way I won't hear of Andy leaving it—not for a day."

At this announcement Andy gave a growl and a jerk of impatience, and Fabian resorted to entreaty.

"Oh uncle, do let me persuade you to alter your mind. He shall not stay more than a month, we will both promise that. And if the expense is any obstacle, *I* will pay for his journey there and back gladly, and for his provision meanwhile, sooner than go without him."

"I tell you it can't be, so let me hear no more about it."

"And why can't it be?" broke in Andy, injudiciously. "Am I to be kept all my life mewed up in this precious hole without a chance of seeing outside of it? Other farmers' sons are allowed to leave Mordham. Old Benson sent Harry and Bob for a couple of months to London last year. Why am I only to be kept like a common labourer, plodding

over this beastly place all the year round, without pleasure or amusement of any sort? It's too hard." And as he concluded, Andy threw down his knife and fork upon the table and leaned back in his chair, with anything but an amiable expression of countenance. The farmer had intended to conduct the business quietly, but his naturally violent temper could not stand this exhibition of his son's discontent."

"Why! why!" he ejaculated; "because I *choose* it. Isn't that enough for you?"

"Yes, and more than enough," muttered Andy. "I know if *I* had the choosing what my choice would be, and that's never to see the farm nor you again."

"Andy, Andy, be silent," said Fabian, who foresaw what a dreadful outbreak such a speech must lead to.

"Oh, that would be your choice, would it?" rejoined Farmer Hayes, in a marvellously quiet tone. "You would choose never to see me nor the farm again! Well, then, I tell you what, sir," he continued, suddenly breaking into a voice of thunder that made them all start in their chairs, "Iv'e a great mind, in return for that speech, to horsewhip you off the farm before nightfall, and dare you ever to show your face within the walls of my house from this hour to that of your death."

"And that would be such a precious loss, wouldn't it?" sneered Andy, who was now thoroughly roused. "Your *house*—your prison, you mean. The gaol where you've brought up that poor girl and myself to quake at the sound of your voice, and to have but one idea in our heads—how best to cheat your anger by lying, or thieving, or deceiving in any other way that came easiest to us to do."

"Here's a pretty confession," roared the farmer. "Take care I don't end by landing you in the county gaol, young man, where I'd put you as soon as look at you, if I found good cause."

"I know you could. You'd have sent us and our poor mother to the union if the parish authorities would have allowed it, in order to save yourself the cost of the bread and cheese we ate. You'd have jumped at Fabian's offer to keep me for a month, if it wasn't that you know you'd have to get someone in my stead to do all the hard and dirty work you put upon me, and that any other farmer in the county, in your position, would be ashamed to see his son do. You're called 'Skinflint Hayes' behind your back, all over Mordham, and I've never had the face to contradict the name. I wouldn't tell such a lie for all the bringing up you've given me!"

The farmer made no answer to these remarks,

but his countenance worked with anger, and as Andy came to a conclusion, he rose from his seat and walked towards a corner of the room where a number of whips and sticks were piled against the wall. Milly and Fabian, who were watching his movements anxiously, guessed his intention at once, and did all they could to avert the coming calamity.

"Andy, darling, for God's sake be quiet," implored his sister.

"Don't be a fool, Andy," said his cousin, with sterner caution. "You're provoking your father beyond endurance, and hopelessly losing your own cause."

But Andrew Hayes, as has been said from the first, was very like his father in some things, and there was a dogged obstinacy in him that was entirely blind to its own advantage. The more his cousin and his sister entreated him to be silent, the more determined he became to have his "say" out.

"There's not another fellow of my age in Norfolk who would take the trouble to ask leave to go on a visit of a few weeks, and I think I was a great fool not to go with Fabian straight off,

and leave you to find out where I was as you best might."

"You do, do you?" said the farmer, approaching his son in the rear.

Andy looked round, and caught sight of the whip in his hand. In a moment he had sprung to his feet.

"That's your little game, is it?" he exclaimed loudly, as he confronted his father. "Well, strike me, if you dare! But as there is a God in heaven, you'll live to repent it!"

"Uncle! uncle! Pray don't!" said Fabian, rising also to his feet.

"Father!" screamed Milly, in deprecation of his uplifted hand. But Farmer Hayes's temper had been too much excited to permit him to listen to reason, and he had been too much used to thrashing Andy to anticipate any evil consequences. So the lash descended upon the shoulders of the young man heavily, and had been raised a second time for the same purpose, when Andrew sprang forward, and seizing the whip-handle from his father's grasp, broke it into a dozen pieces, and flinging them upon the floor, stamped on them.

"That's the last time you thrash me!" he ex-

claimed, with set teeth; "so make the most of it. And"—clenching his fists—"if you come one step nearer to me I'll knock you down. If you were twenty times my father I'd do it. So look out for yourself. And if you don't live to repent this day, may I——"

"Andy," interposed Fabian, coming between the two men, "I cannot let you speak to your father in my presence like that. I love you, Andy! There is no need for me to tell you so; and here, before my uncle, I repeat the offer I made you to come to Brusca with me at my own expense, and see if a month's absence may not soften your feelings towards each other. But take my advice now, Andy, and go—you are not in a fit state to speak to anyone. Leave the room, and don't meet your father again until you are cooler and better able to argue the matter."

"You're a downright good fellow, Fabian," said his cousin with white lips. "Yes, I'll go, as you advise me, but I repeat what I said—that man shall live to repent this day's work and what it brings him."

He rushed out of the room as he spoke, and they heard him go up the stairs. The farmer, after looking at the broken pieces of whip-handle in a

vague way, as if he could not at all understand how they came to be there, staggered towards a chair and sat down. The arm he leaned upon the table shook so that Fabian mistook his rage for emotion, and attempted to console him.

"Andrew spoke very unwisely, uncle, but I am sure he cannot mean what he said. He will ask your pardon by-and-by. But he is sadly disappointed about this little holiday. He has worked hard, and he considers he has earned it. Won't you think better of your decision, uncle? Would it not soften down a great deal of this bitter feeling between my cousin and yourself, if you were to grant his wish, and let him come over to Brusca with me?"

"No, sir! it would not," said Hayes, thumping his hand upon the table, "and he shall not go. That's the long and the short of it. The young hound has got the best of it this time, perhaps, but I'll thrash him again—and again—and again—until he crawls to my feet and licks my hand—as sure as my name's Henry Hayes!"

"He will never do it!" said Fabian, decidedly.

"He *shall* do it!" exclaimed the farmer, as he rose to leave the room, "and if I hear any more of this nonsense, *you* shall do it into the bargain."

"You'd better try it," replied Fabian, proudly.

"No, uncle! it is of no use speaking in that manner to me. I am beyond your control!"

"And yet you expect me to go out of my way to serve you," said Hayes, turning upon the threshold, "to send my son over to the confounded foreign place where you were brought up, to be made a greater scoundrel than he is—to learn a strange lingo and a strange religion—be turned into a Papist maybe, and come back to fill Mordham with graven images and strings of beads. Well, there, *I won't do it*—I won't do it! Do you hear me? *I won't do it!*" And with that the door slammed violently, and the cousins were left to themselves.

"He is quite mad!" said Fabian, with mild pity. "It's the most charitable way of looking at it, Milly."

But poor little Milly was sobbing without restraint.

"Oh Milly, pray don't cry! It is terrible to see you."

"Fabian! what else can I do? I am so miserable and so frightened. Father will drive Andy away from home by his violence. I am sure he will. And you are going to Brusca, and I shall be left alone—quite alone—with him."

“Milly! I will not go. I cannot leave you unprotected! I will stay in Mordham until your father gives his consent to your leaving it with me. Would you come, dear Milly? Would you be my wife, and come and live in Brusca with me? No one shall hurt or frighten you there, dear. No one shall ever come near you without my leave, and I will stand between you and every sorrow, Milly!”

The thought was like the thought of heaven to the girl's perplexed and anxious mind.

“Oh Fabian!” she commenced, “do you really love me like this? Do you really care for me enough to marry me?” She had lifted her tear-stained face from the table, and Fabian was just about to kiss the tears away and make some answer in the affirmative, when the door was suddenly flung open again and Farmer Hayes stood upon the threshold. Not as he had left them, red and choking with his rage, but livid with chagrin and trembling with excitement.

“*Robbed!*” he ejaculated, holding out a small empty canvas bag towards them. “I’ve been robbed, I tell you, of fifty pounds in gold. Fifty pounds that I put in this bag only yesterday, and locked away with my own hands. And I believe it’s *you* who’ve done it,” he continued, advancing towards Fabian. “No one in this house would have dared

to touch it except you. You've come back to Mordham, and you've robbed me like a thief as you are—you've robbed me of fifty pounds in gold, like a thief."

CHAPTER XIV.

Milly loses her Lover.

FOR a moment Fabian did not seem to know what answer to make to this accusation. The astonishment it caused almost stunned him. His uncle had often wrongfully accused him before of faults of which he had been entirely innocent, but he had never dared to impugn his honesty. And now to be deliberately told that he was suspected of stealing money like a common thief was too much even for his equanimity. His voice was almost as loud and unrestrained as Andy's had been, as he answered the farmer's insulting assertion.

"What do you mean, uncle, by speaking to me like this? How dare you accuse me of stealing your property, or that of any man?"

"Oh! it's very easy to bluster over it," replied Hayes, "but what else would you have me believe? That money was safe this morning, I'll take my oath of it. I locked it away myself last night, and no one entered my room whilst I was there. You came home early this afternoon—quite early they tell me

in the kitchen—and all your cry is that you must have your money—you must have your money—and you must go over the water to Brusca. You can't stay even a few days at Mordham, though I stooped to ask you. And what does all that mean, I should like to know, excepting that you've taken my money and you want to escape? Yes! that's the word—before you are found out. But I went to my desk, and it's gone, as you see—it's gone—and not another living soul would have *dared* to touch it!"

"And you seriously believe I have taken it," said Fabian. "Why, this beats everything you have ever done before. It is an insult which I shall never forget—nor forgive."

"Oh father! you cannot think of what you are accusing Fabian. *He* take your money, who has always been so good and kind to all of us. It is impossible! Think again, and you will see the impossibility of it!"

"Stay, Milly! I do not wish you, nor anyone, to plead my cause with your father. He has accused me of a grave crime, and the injustice demands a settlement between ourselves. If I chose to stoop to explanation, sir," continued Fabian to his uncle, "I might prove to you that, from the moment I entered your house this afternoon, until you joined

the party, I never quitted this room. I was witness on my arrival to the brutal manner in which you had treated my poor cousin here, and the interest I took in her wrongs occupied me till you came home yourself. But I do not choose it. I do not choose to make your servants the witnesses to my honesty. But if you don't recall the words you said to me just now, before I quit Mordham I'll have you up in a court of justice, and make you answer then for defamation of my character. Take your choice!"

The young man's indignant flashing eye and determined manner showed the farmer how completely he was in earnest. He didn't like the idea of a court of justice, and he began to think he might have been hasty.

"But it's extraordinary," he began, "it's not to be accounted for. Fifty sovereigns in gold put safely away in a canvas bag in my desk last night, and this evening—all of them gone! They can't have walked off by themselves, and none of my servants would dare—they are respectable people—they would not presume——"

"I have nothing to do with all this. Your servants may be honest or they may not. Let them look out for themselves. But I have to do with my own reputation, and I repeat what I said before;

you shall either apologise to me here, in the presence of your daughter, before whom you insulted me, for the gross indignity you have put upon me, or you shall repeat it before your household, and render yourself liable to an action for libel."

Farmer Hayes hesitated. It was strange to see to what a craven condition the loss of his money had reduced him. The hand that held the empty bag still shook violently, and, notwithstanding the cool evening, beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Well, perhaps I can't be sure," he began.

"That won't do, Mr. Hayes. You must be sure one way or the other. Emily can tell you I have never left this room since I entered the house."

"But how do I know she is not in league with you to defraud me? Fifty golden sovereigns gone—clean disappeared, not one of them left—and the desk locked as securely as if the keys had never left my pocket!"

"I don't care if fifty thousand sovereigns had gone. I tell you I never saw one of them. Will you apologise for having insulted me by the doubt, or will you not?"

"I suppose you did not take them then, Fabian; but it is a very strange proceeding—most strange

and unaccountable. And I will find out the thief if I hunt for him from now to doomsday. Fifty golden sovereigns! It is a terrible loss. Fifty sovereigns!"

"Emily, you hear what your father says," observed Fabian to the drooping girl, who appeared fated to be mixed up in every quarrel that took place as well as her own, "that he does not now *suppose* that I took his money. It is a lame apology, but I conclude it is the best I shall get out of him. And now, sir," he continued to his uncle, "be good enough to lead the way to your own sitting-room."

"What for?" demanded Hayes.

"To settle up your accounts with me and discharge the money due! You can scarcely expect, after what has just passed between us, that I shall sleep another night under your roof."

This proposal staggered the farmer. He had looked over the accounts himself, and knew there was a balance of fifty-seven pounds in Fabian's favour. And the robbery that had just been committed had left him without sufficient cash to satisfy the claim.

"But I can't settle with you!" he stammered. "It is impossible. Here are fifty sovereigns, all the ready money I had in the house, taken from me, and my balance at the banker's, too, is very low."

"That cannot affect my income, if you have been an honest guardian to me. If you cannot pay me in cash, you must give me your cheque for the amount, for this night sees us parted for ever. I will not stoop to break bread with the man who doubts my honesty."

Then the farmer perceived what a terrible mistake he had made, and, being like most bullies a great coward, attempted to repair the error by conciliation.

"You mustn't say that," he uttered sheepishly. "I am afraid I spoke rather roughly just now, Fabian, because this loss has considerably upset me—fifty sovereigns is a great loss to a poor man, but I was wrong to accuse you of theft, and I am sorry I did it."

"And I am *not* sorry," retorted his nephew, "since it affords me an excuse for breaking off with you for ever. You have been a hard task-master to me, uncle, ever since I was first brought, a poor, trembling, timid child, to Mordham. You have meted out my due to me most grudgingly, and you have never given me one indulgence—one word of kindness—I may even say one *look*, of your own free will. You have tried to coerce and break my spirit as you did that of my poor aunt—as you have tried to do those of your own children—but I thank

God you have entirely failed. I stand to-day before you, a man, free not only in person but in mind—and my mind, judging you by the past and by the present, tells me that *you are a bad man*, worth not one-half the care, and attention, and obedience, which your tyranny has exacted from others!”

At this outspoken truth Farmer Hayes started angrily, and was about to resent it, when the remembrance of what he owed Fabian returned to sober him.

“I daresay you are surprised at my boldness,” continued Fabian, “but I *will* speak to you before we part. You attend your chapel regularly, and pass for a Christian amongst your brethren, but there’s not one of the good men who believe you to be sincere but would hold you up to public execration, if they knew you for what you are. And I am speaking to you now, uncle, not on my own behalf, but on that of my cousins. I am beyond your control or the effects of your brutality, and very soon I shall be beyond the reach even of your voice. But your children will be left behind. Isn’t it a shame that I should be obliged to plead the cause of your own children with you—the only son and daughter you possess? But I know how miserable you have made their lives hitherto, and

if it continues in the future what it has been in the past, I swear solemnly that there is not a chapel-goer in Mordham but what shall learn your true character from my lips. I'll tell them how my poor aunt lived and died, and how you have treated your children and your servants and myself since, until they shall hoot you at the very doors of the chapel, which you enter each Sunday with a sanctimonious face that looks as though it had never hurt a fly. I've made up my mind, uncle, and now you know it; so perhaps we had better go to business."

The farmer rose without a word and left the room, followed by his nephew. Milly Hayes looked after them in astonishment. What had come to her father that he was actually dumb before his youthful assailant? She had never seen the power of truth and courage opposed to cruelty and hypocrisy before. She had hardly recovered her surprise before Fabian had rushed into the room again, and she could feel that the face he pressed against hers in the dusk was wet with tears.

"Milly! dear Milly! I must go! I cannot remain a moment longer in the house where I have been so bitterly insulted. Forgive me for speaking so openly to your father; I did it for your sake and Andy's. Tell dear Andy all that took place this

evening, and say, if ever home becomes too hot for him, my offer and my promise will stand good—for all time, Milly, even to the end of life!”

“Oh Fabian! must you really, really go?”

“I must. Don’t make it harder than it is. It is very hard, Milly, especially after what we said before all this happened, but you won’t forget me, will you?”

“Never—never!”

“Neither shall I forget you. And I will write you long letters, and keep you well informed of all I do and see; and some day, when I am older and more settled in life, when I have really a home which I can ask you to come and share, you won’t forget your promise to me, Milly?”

“Fabian! how could I?”

“And, meanwhile, you will be brave, and try to bear up for my sake, and remember that wherever I may be, I am always loving you, and thinking of you, and planning for you. And the day may come, Milly, sooner perhaps than we expect, when I will be able to take you from this unhappy home, and make you forget misery for ever.”

“Ah Fabian! you will meet with so many girls over there better than I. It is not likely you will remember me for long.”

“You do me an injustice by the thought, Milly.

My feelings to you are based on something far more lasting than mere admiration; and I swear to you, that, whether we are married or not, whilst you live I will never make another woman my wife."

"Fabian! I *will* believe and hope, and try to be happy."

"That's a dear girl! And you will have Andy by your side to protect you and keep up your spirits. Don't forget my message to dear Andy. God bless you—God bless you!"

And with a farewell kiss he was gone. He walked along the road that led to the next town hurriedly, swinging his light portmanteau in his hand, and scarcely daring to take a last look at all the old familiar objects by the way, lest it should upset him. Finding it impossible to get any money out of his uncle, he had been obliged to accept a cheque for the amount due to him, and was seriously pondering whether he should have sufficient cash to pay his coach-hire back to Norwich, considering that he could not start until the following morning. Once in Norwich, he knew his old friend and tutor, Mr. Sutton, would cash his cheque for him, and trust to his honesty to refund the money should the paper be dishonoured by his uncle's banker, which sundry lamentations and fears on the part of Mr. Hayes whilst drawing it had led Fabian to surmise

might be the case. He had walked to within a mile of Blackeney, however, when a low whistle from an adjoining field attracted his attention, and looking over the hedge, he perceived in the dusk a dark figure running towards him. What was his surprise, when it came near enough for recognition, to see his cousin Andrew.

"Why, Andy, old fellow! however did you spot me from such a distance? I had no idea it was you, till you were close at hand."

"I was on the rising ground, above Benson's Patch, when I saw someone come swinging along the high road with a portmanteau in his hand. I knew who it was at once. There's no mistaking you, Fabian. There's not such another whipper-snapper for his height in all Mordham; besides, you carry your head differently from the natives. And what may you be doing on the road to Blakeney at this time of night?"

"I've been grossly insulted by your father, Andy, and it is impossible one roof can ever cover us again. He actually had the audacity to accuse me of stealing fifty pounds from his desk! Ay, you may well start! Nothing he has ever done yet has equalled this. To suspect *me*—a gentleman—my father's son, of robbing him like a common thief—of coming back to Mordham for that purpose only,

and of wanting to abscond afterwards to avoid detection?"

"As if you'd do it," said Andy.

"You may well say 'as if I'd do it!' I told my uncle at once that he must apologise to me for the affront and let me go! I gave him a bit of my mind, I can tell you, Andy, and I hope it may do some good, perhaps for you and Milly; but nothing on earth should have induced me to sleep in the house again."

"And you're off, for good and all!"

"It must be. There is nothing else left for me to do. I gave your sister a message for you, to say that if ever you wished to claim it, my promise to receive you as my guest stood good, wherever I might be."

"Then let me claim it now, Fabian. I shall never stand more in need of it than at this moment. Take me with you to Brusca."

"What, without a word to them at home?"

"Do you suppose I am going back to that hole again either, after the way in which he treated me this afternoon? No, Fabian, never. What do you suppose I was skulking about that field for. Not to see you, because I didn't know you would leave the farm to-night. It was only to pass the time till I

could sneak into Blakeney without having all the villagers starting in a hue-and-cry after me, and from there I meant to write to the old man and tell him I was off, and he might look out for someone else to thrash, for he'd seen the last of me. Would any man of my age stand it, Fabian? I'm nearer twenty-two than twenty-one, and yet he treats me like a baby!"

"No; you are right! No one could be expected to endure it for ever. But what were your plans, Andy? What did you mean to do?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Go on to London, I think, and try to work there."

"Without friends or money?"

Had it not been so dark, Fabian would have been surprised to see how strangely this simple question had the power to bring the blood into his cousin's cheek. But he could detect no variation in the voice that answered it.

"Well, I've got a friend—at least, there's a fellow in Blakeney who knows the governor very well—has dealings with him you know, and all that sort of thing—and I felt sure, if I told him the state of affairs, that he'd have no objection to lend me a small sum till I could repay it."

"That's very lucky!" cried Fabian, cheerfully.

"Why? I shan't require it now, shall I?"

"Certainly not! Didn't I say you were to be my guest to Brusca. That was when I thought you were coming over with me only for pleasure. But *now*, Andy, now that we row in the same boat, and are cast by your father's treatment on the world together, we will travel, not as host and guest, but as brothers—fast, firm friends and brothers—and everything I possess is yours as much as it is mine—down to the last farthing."

"I don't know what to say to you, Fabian. You're miles and miles too good for me!"

"Say nothing, dear old fellow, except that you love me well enough to accept my offer. But about your Blakeney friend? The reason I said it was lucky you had one there is because, under the circumstances, he will doubtless cash your father's cheque for us."

"What cheque?"

"One he has just given me for fifty-seven pounds—the amount he owed me. I was doubting before we met whether, after a bed and breakfast at the inn, I should have enough ready money to pay my coach-fare to Norwich to-morrow; and now that there will be two of us, of course I shall not. But if this person with whom your father deals will cash the

cheque for us, it will be all right. Who is he? The man who keeps the inn?"

"Oh no," replied Andrew, in rather an uncertain voice; "quite another person."

"But you think he'll do it?"

"I'm not sure. Father's not such a favourite, you know, with his neighbours that they're over and above anxious to oblige him, and fifty-seven pounds is a large sum. He might and he might not."

"We can but try," said Fabian.

Their conversation then merged into other subjects, particularly that of Milly. Fabian did not tell Andy what had passed between his sister and himself, partly because he was shy, and partly because there seemed very little probability at present of its coming to anything. But they both resolved that, before they started for London on the following day, they must write and confide all their plans and intentions to Milly, and make sure that their letters reached her by some trustworthy messenger. As they were entering the streets of Blakeney, Andy again reverted to the subject of the change.

"I wouldn't try and change that cheque till I got to Norwich, if I were you, Fabian. It's a large sum.

for you to draw, and it will excite talk and notice, and someone may come to find I'm with you, and I want to keep it dark till I'm well out of this blessed place."

"All right, Andy; but how am I to pay our coach-fares without it?"

"The man—the friend I told you of," stammered Andy. "He's a real good 'un to me, though he hates the governor like poison; and he'll lend me ten pounds fast enough, I'm sure of that."

"But then there will be all the trouble of repaying it when we get abroad, Andy. And if your object is to keep quiet till you're out of the country, it seems to me to be running your head into the lion's jaw."

"Well, do as you like, of course," replied young Hayes, rather sulkily; "but if you take my advice, you'll let me have my own way."

And Fabian, who would have sacrificed any inclination sooner than see his cousin out of humour, consented readily to Andy's plan which was accordingly executed during a secret expedition taken by young Hayes that evening after their arrival in the town.

So the two cousins found themselves passengers by the coach to Norwich on the following morning; and Fabian, judging by the liberality with which

Andy spent his money on the journey, concluded that the convenient friend at Blakeney had lent him a larger sum than he had intended asking for.

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CHAPTER XV.

Andy is introduced to Brusca.

THEY did not stay at Norwich longer than was necessary to exchange the coach for the train. Had he been alone, Fabian would probably have called upon Mr. Sutton to explain the reason he had curtailed his visit to Mordham, and to arrange about changing his uncle's cheque; but in deference to Andy's wish that no clue to his destination should reach Mr. Hayes sooner than was absolutely necessary, they went straight through to London.

It was not till they were actually in the train that the thought of Rosie Barnes crossed Fabian's mind.

"Andy," he said to his cousin, "won't poor Rosie be in great trouble about your leaving home so suddenly?"

"I am afraid she will—in fact, I know she is, Fabian, for I saw her last night, before I joined you on the Blakeney road."

"What did she say to it?"

"Oh, she cried a good deal; but all girls do that, you know. Crying comes as natural to them as smoking does to us. And she wanted me to take her with me straight off, then and there. As if I could!"

"What can she have been thinking of to propose such a thing?" said Fabian. "She knows you have nothing to support a wife on. You couldn't marry her yet!"

"I don't know that she was thinking about marriage, and I'm sure I wasn't," rejoined Andy, with a coarse laugh.

"Andy, you shouldn't speak so carelessly of the girl you're engaged to. It wrongs both her and yourself. I suppose poor Rosie was so cut up at your going away that she hardly knew what she was saying."

"Don't know, I'm sure. Any way, that's what she did say. But I stuffed her up with a lot of lies about sending for her, or going back to fetch her as soon as I had made some money, and I daresay she's reconciled herself to the idea by this time."

"But you *will* fetch her as soon as you are able. You mean to stick to Rosie, Andy, don't you?"

"Of course. Only the question is, when *shall* I be able? Money's not made in a minute nowadays, and it takes a precious deal to keep a wife. It was a different matter when I thought I was going to have the farm."

"Well, the best thing we can do, I think, is to travel as fast as we can to Brusca, without stopping anywhere, and consult Père Raoul. He knows everybody there, English as well as French, and will be able to tell us at once whether there is any opening for you abroad. I feel very sanguine about it, Andy, and sure everything will come right in the end; and my heart is so light at the prospect of seeing the old place again that I could sing for joy."

Andrew caught the infection of his cousin's high spirits, and nothing could exceed the merriment of the two young men upon this their first journey into the world, and the farther they left Mordham behind them the merrier they became. One night passed in town, in a dingy, commercial inn near the docks, did not tend to heighten their regret at not having more leisure to spend in the modern Babylon, and the next morning found them steaming down the river in one of those little boats that ply between London and Antwerp, enchanted with the novelty of the fresh air and rapid travelling,

and disposed to make the very best of everything that befell them. Fabian dissuaded his cousin from staying in Antwerp, as they had first proposed to do when talking over this journey together.

"If we have the leisure and the inclination, we can so easily return to it," he said, "but at present I feel as if I could not enjoy anything until we have seen and conversed with Père Raoul. How surprised he will be to see us! He knows that I intend returning to Brusca, of course, but he does not expect me for some weeks yet. Let me consider. If we first allow ourselves a peep at the cathedral here, and a luncheon at the *estaminet*, we shall reach Brusca about the time of vespers. Père Raoul will be at S. Joseph, and we will sit down in his little room—how well I remember it—and watch the surprise in his face when he opens the door and sees us there. Andy, how can I ever have stayed away from them all so long?"

Fabian's delight, too, at finding that he had lost neither the faculty of speaking nor making himself understood in French was almost childish in his excitement. He had been so entirely cut off from all communication with foreigners whilst in England, that he had not had an opportunity of testing his memory in this particular, though the letters he had

exchanged with Père Raoul since the prohibition had, perforce, by reason of Fabian's age, been taken off their correspondence, had convinced him he had not lost all recollection of the first language he learned. But now, when he found that he was at no loss to express himself, and could, indeed, after an hour or two spent in the country, talk as fluently as ever, his pleasure was unbounded. Indeed, when a girl whom they met in the cathedral exclaimed with veritable surprise after some remark made by Fabian, "*Mais, monsieur n'est pas Anglais!*" the lad's eyes filled with tears of pleasure.

"I feel the truth of it so," he said, when repeating the circumstance to his cousin. "I am *not* an Englishman, Andy. I never was—I never should have been. I was like a man who has been brought up in prison from a child, and can only faintly remember the green fields and the blue skies of his infancy, until he is set free to see them again, and all the past rushes back upon his memory like a flood that has burst its bounds. And, oh! with these old familiar sights and sounds, come back the thought—painfully vivid—of my father—my handsome, clever, noble, warm-hearted father, whom I shall never see in this world again—if he could only welcome me back to Brusca—but I know it can never, never be!"

"Andy, old fellow! don't think the less of me for these tears, I cannot help them! You have seen me bear hard words, and blows too, without flinching; but there is something in coming back to these scenes of my childhood that knocks me over worse than any cruelty could do."

"I don't think the less of you, Fabian; rather more, perhaps, if there's any difference. And I don't wonder at your liking to come back to this place. How you ever stood Mordham after it beats me! And aren't the girls nice, too? Such bright black eyes and neat little figures. I wonder what some of our Norfolk lasses would give for such a trim shape as that!"

"Come, come, Andy," exclaimed Fabian, smiling through his tears, "I can't have your eyes roving after that fashion. What would Rosie say if she could hear you? It's lucky you can't talk French, or I should never get you past these little Flemish coquettes in time for the train."

"I mean to talk it as soon as I can, old boy, or at all events, well enough to make myself understood by the ladies, I can tell you."

"Well, then, the very best instructor you could find for the purpose is my dear Père Raoul. He speaks pure Parisian—none of your Flemish *patois*;

and his mind and manners are as refined as his language. Come, Andy, don't stand there with your mouth open. If we are to catch the afternoon train to Brusca we have no time to lose."

Andy was wrapped in the contemplation of a pretty Antwerp milkmaid—with her large gold earrings and fine Mechlin lace cap, her bright brass milk-cans, wreathed with green boughs and flowers, standing in a little cart, drawn by a big dog in harness—and it was by force alone that Fabian, having linked their arms together, dragged his cousin away to the railway station. Everything occurred just as they had anticipated. They reached the priest's rooms in Brusca whilst he was away at evening service, and his old housekeeper, who had lived with him for forty years, and knew Fabian as a little boy, received them with delight, and thoroughly entered into their little plan for surprising her master. She ushered the lads into Père Raoul's sitting-room to await his return, and closed the door upon them.

The priest's rooms were situated in the Grande Place or principal square of Brusca, in the centre of which stood the magnificent church of S. Joseph. The evening shadows were beginning to creep over the town, and as the lads seated themselves in the cool, plainly-furnished little parlour, all sorts of sweet

scents and sounds came through the open window. The tinkling bells on the harness of the dog-carts mingled with the half-distinguishable notes of the organ in S. Joseph, and the chorus of a drinking-song, trolled out by some German students in the next square; whilst the girls carrying home the crushed refuse of the flower-market, and the itinerant vendors of fruit, filled the soft summer air with a faint rich perfume.

"I say, isn't this jolly, after knocking about all day," exclaimed Andy, stretching himself in a chair. Fabian was leaning from the window, and did not immediately answer. This was not the square in which he had lived with his father, but it was very near it, very very near.

"What a rum little room," continued Andy, looking round him; "without any carpet or curtains, and only a couple of prints on the walls. I suppose this isn't the priest's best room, is it, Fabian?"

"It's his worst and his best," replied his cousin; "the only one he has, Andy, besides his bedroom. Père Raoul was a very rich man, I have heard, before he went into the Church, but he gives everything away to the poor and keeps nothing for himself. Hush, Andy, here he comes! He has just turned out of the sacristy door. How the children

gather round him! They will hardly let him put one foot before the other. And now the mothers have got hold of him. Will they ever let him reach his own door? Everyone has a word to say to him, just as they used to of old! Ah! at last he is there, and coming this way. How white his hair is to what it used to be, and how much slower he seems to walk. Now he is on the very doorstep. This way, Andy. Let us seat ourselves on these chairs, and watch his look of astonishment when first he catches sight of us."

The little room in which they sat was nearly dark now, as they ensconced themselves in the shadow behind the door. They heard the priest's voice, as he ascended the stairs, giving directions to his servant in French to bring the lamp.

"And a little piece of meat with my supper if you have it in the house, my good Marguerite," he continued, "for I have fasted since breakfast this morning, and I am inclined to be hungry."

"As if I didn't know that, *mon père*," replied the housekeeper. "Why, you remained three hours by the bedside of that dying man, whilst the nice dinner I had cooked for you was burnt to a cinder, and obliged to be thrown away. And he didn't die after all, too! That was the shame of it!"

"No; thanks to the good God, who saw he was not fit to be taken yet, he will be spared a little longer. It is better that your nice dinner should be burned up by the fire, my good Marguerite, than poor Jules Griquot in the flames of hell, is it not?"

"Ah, well, *mon père!* I would rather not decide; but all I know is that you might be starved to death before any of your parishioners would care. An unreasonable lot! However, I have a tender chicken and a salad ready for your supper, and I hope at least you'll try and eat them."

"A chicken!" exclaimed the priest, good-humouredly. "What extravagance! I shall have to get another housekeeper, Marguerite, if you waste my substance after that fashion."

"And yet you sent a couple of them out of the house yesterday," retorted the servant.

"Aye; to the sick—to the sick poor, who have none but God and their priest to look after them."

"Isn't he good?" whispered Fabian, enthusiastically, to Andy. "He is just the same as he ever was."

"Well, I've got something more than chicken and salad for your supper to-night, *mon père,*" continued Marguerite; "and if you'll go up to the parlour, you'll see what it is."

"Then bring me the lamp," rejoined Père Raoul, as he entered the room, "for at present I can see nothing—not even my way."

The housekeeper entered with the light, and the priest glanced at the table. It was bare.

"You are jesting with me, my good Marguerite," he said mildly.

"Am I? Look behind the door, then," she replied; throwing the light she carried upon the two young men, one of whom, no longer able to contain his impatience, had started from his chair. Père Raoul gazed at him for a moment in dazed perplexity—then, with sudden intelligence, exclaimed: "Is it possible? Can it be?"

"Yes, yes, *mon père*," cried Fabian, darting forward, and kissing the priest's hand. "It is I—Fabian Delacourt—to whom you were so good in the old days, come back to ask for your blessing and your counsel!"

The scene that followed is difficult to describe. To Andrew Hayes, unused to the ebullitions of excitement so common amongst foreigners, it appeared forced and unnatural; to Fabian, on whose sunny nature English reserve had fallen but coldly, it was simply a welcome home.

The priest embraced and wept over the young man by turns—held him at arm's length, hardly believing he could be the same curly-headed little boy he had taken to England ten years before, and then, convinced by the look in his eyes, and the familiarity of his tongue, strained him to his heart again with the fervour of a woman. And when their first transports at reunion were over, and the first hurried questions put and answered, Fabian introduced Andrew to his old friend's notice, and Père Raoul's thoughts turned at once to hospitality.

"How good of you to come straight to me," he said, "and to bring your cousin with you. It was like you, Fabian! Like my dear, frank, open-hearted boy of old! Marguerite, I must have supper laid at once for my young English princes here. Run round to the *restaurant* and bring whatever you can lay your hands on."

"*Mon père*, did I not tell you that I had a beautiful chicken already roasting at the fire?" screamed Marguerite, from the lower region.

"Foolish old woman! A chicken is not enough for three hungry men! Go at once and ask Madame Schmidt to let me have a *rôti*—a *paté*—a little *dessert*, anything which she may have on hand. And in the cellar cupboard, Marguerite, you will find

two or three bottles of Cliquot, kept from the last time the Abbé lunched with me. Bring them up, Marguerite. It is right we should make merry, now our dear Monsieur Fabian has returned to us again."

"Oh, *mon père*, how can I thank you sufficiently for all your interest in me, and your affection for me, preserved, too, after so many years of separation? What claim have I, who have given you nothing but trouble since the day my poor father left us, upon you that you should celebrate our reunion as though I were your own child?"

"That is just how I feel it, Fabian. Had it not been that circumstances were against me, I should have adopted you as my son, and brought you up in these little rooms to which you have returned as a bird to its nest."

"I wish I might never leave them again, *mon père*. But my cousin—or rather, let me say brother, for that is what Andy is to me—and I have come to you, under rather painful circumstances to ask your advice, by which we intend to abide entirely."

"It is no sorrow, my children, is it?" inquired the priest, anxiously.

"Not exactly sorrow, *mon père*, but perplexity and——"

"Then no advice until after supper," said Père Raoul, gaily; "we will do justice to old Marguerite's foraging and the remainder of the Abbé's Cliquot first, and then we will discuss the matter that perplexes my friends, and try and find a way out of the difficulty. *Allons, mes braves!* you must be both tired and hungry after your long journey. Let us eat and drink, and when you are satisfied, if you still desire to do so, you shall confide your difficulties to me, whilst Marguerite goes to secure your beds for the night. But men can neither talk nor listen well upon empty stomachs."

Fabian and Andy, not unwilling to take the good priest's advice, drew their chairs up to the table, and did full justice to the viands placed before them, whilst Père Raoul, eating but sparingly himself, insisted on waiting on his guests. The meal concluded, he ordered the lads to light their pipes, and taking a seat opposite Fabian, gazed at him with undisguised affection.

"Am I what you expected to find me, *mon père?*" inquired the young man, smiling.

"You are the image of your father, Fabian—the speaking, living image of my good friend Delacourt. How surprised and pleased M. Fevrier will be to see you. He often speaks of you and of your prospects

in life. He has set his heart upon your becoming an artist."

Fabian sighed.

"And so had I set my heart upon it, but I do not know now if it will ever be!"

"How is that? I hope you are not fickle in your fancies, Fabian? A doctor's life did not appear to suit you. Have you also lost your taste for painting?"

"No, *mon père*, nor ever shall. But circumstances have arisen lately that make it incumbent on me to say not what shall I, but what can I, do?"

He then proceeded to tell the priest what had occurred at Mordham Farm, and the reason his cousin's fortunes had been cast in with his own. In deference to Andy's feelings, Fabian made as light as possible of his uncle's treatment of them both, but Père Raoul, who was so well used to reading human nature, traced the sweet, unselfish spirit that induced this reticence throughout and thought as much of it as he did of Fabian's generosity in offering to divide his fortune with his cousin, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that they should share and share alike.

"And so you see, *mon père*," concluded Fabian, "that Andy and I must look out for work that will

bring in a certain return, however small, and give us some prospect of independence for the future. I might have managed to live upon the interest of the money, and not take heed whether my paintings sold or not; but now that there are two of us, it is different. And Andy has even a greater incentive than I have to try and become independent as soon as he can, for he is engaged to be married to a young lady in Norfolk, and he must work for her sake if not for his own. Tell us, then, *mon père*, is there any opening for the labour of two young fellows like ourselves in Brusca?"

"In Brusca," replied the priest, meditatively. "Well it is difficult to say, Fabian. For yourself, you speak the language fluently (the want of which would stand greatly in your cousin's way). But, even then, what could you do? Besides civil engineering—which is a life's study in itself—we are not given to employing foreigners in any public capacity. Our farming—which appears to be the only thing Monsieur Hayes has been accustomed to—we keep in our own hands. It is conducted on principles entirely different from yours. But one plan has struck me for his employment which, if agreeable to him, I may be able to forward. What would your cousin say to taking a situation in Java?"

"*In Java!*" exclaimed the young men simultaneously, both their interests roused at once by an idea as novel as it was exciting.

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